The Legendary Moonlight Sculptor

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Annotation

Lee Hyun, a debt-ridden teenage orphan, puts his account of the top-level avatar in the Continent of Magic up for auction. Once the news is spread nationwide, a fierce competition to win his avatar breaks out, making him a multimillionaire overnight.

However, when men in black show up to collect the debts Hyun's parents owed them; he ends up where he started — almost penniless. Determined to exact revenge on the loan sharks, he sets out a journey with Weed as his alias, the lowliest of the lowly, in the online RPG game named Royal Road to prove history can repeat itself.

WHY NOT CLAIM THE TOP ONCE AGAIN?

Weed's sugary words and tough action work magic one after another — only until he finds himself becoming a Sculptor, the most contemptible profession in terms of combat ability and career prospect…

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Chapter 1: Weed's Notoriety

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A huge crowd had gathered when Weed reached Morata's square through the movement portal. People were buying and selling goods in the square as well as recruiting party members. With the Northern part of the Versailles Continent being showcased as an adventure region, Morata was flourishing into an even larger city.

“Please look this way!”

“Weed, Weed! Come hunt with us.”

“Are you really Weed from the Continent of Magic?”

There we many people who were trying to get close to him, causing a commotion, asking questions about the River of Lamentation quest, or if he really was Weed from CoM. People even went up onto the castle walls to wave and cheer at Weed.

They welcomed Weed's return like a hero coming home after winning a war.

This was different from the time when he sold cheap sculptures in Rosenheim Kingdom. Weed folded his arms, raised his chin along with his gaze, and emanated arrogance.

“Heh, there are a lot more people here now.”

He had to act unconcerned and completely unalarmed, as though the amount of people gathered were a natural course of events.

Abruptly, Weed yelled with Lion's Roar, “I went. I fought. I earned!”

“WHOOOOAAA!”

Cheers loud enough to shake Morata Square to its foundations erupted at once.

“He said he earned a ton!”

“Imoogi! Please show us the items from the Imoogi you hunted!”

“WEED! WEED! WEED!”

His popularity was greater than that of a pseudo-religious cult leader, and the crowd was at the peak of uncontrollable delight. The hopes and dreams of the ordinary people in the Versailles Continent! After all, Weed had returned after hunting monsters others weren't able to kill, and accomplished a quest no one had ever experienced before.

Morata's Soldiers and the Freya Church's Knights mobilized to contain the situation. Only then was the uproar narrowly suppressed.

The Freya Church's Knights bowed their heads towards Weed politely.

“We would like to thank you for defeating the evil Embinyu

Church. It is an honor to meet the adventurer who will go down in history as the benefactor of the Freya Church."

Weed replied with dignity. "It was nothing. I did not suffer in the slightest. The fight against the Embinyu Church was extremely dull. It was easier than going into a bank to take a nap on a scorching summer day."

He would take a nap in a bank and read comics in a large bookstore. Those were the excellent cultural facilities that had allowed Weed to spend his youth in peace. Since there were several banks in his neighborhood, they were places where he could go in at any time and comfortably utilize. They even arranged the latest magazines categorically for their customers.

The people at the banks would sometimes gossip, but he simply ignored such things! Weed was someone who had even shared deep conversations about today's youths over a cup of coffee, with one of the older guardsmen he had become friends with.

"He's talking with the Knights."

"They're talking to him really politely."

The crowd broke into whispers. The sight of Paladins speaking to Weed was enough to make their stomachs burn with jealousy.

That a portal would suddenly form and Weed would come out of it, was something the Merchants or Warriors doing business in the square had never expected.

"I think this is the first time I've seen the Knights of Freya acting this friendly."

"It must be because they're talking to Weed, right?"

"Of course it is."

With the Knights of Freya arranged in the plaza, there was no one who tried to carelessly approached him.

"Hmm."

As the ruckus calmed down a little, Weed glanced around the square. The crowd in the square was packed in tightly, like a bag of sprouts.

'The number of players here has really grown.'

The thought of taxes occurred to him as he looked at the Merchants sitting in the stalls they had opened in the plaza!

'Should I raise the taxes or not? Even if I only raise the income tax by 1 %, the revenue would be enormous…'

Weed invested all his energy into performing calculations. He was bad at math, but when it came to adding and subtracting money, he had never once made a mistake.

'No, not yet. It's still too early. If give off the impression of being desperate for tax collection this early, I won't be able to unleash a tax bomb later.'

His face paled, and even his expression became agonized.

He needed a clever scheme that would make people feel like he wasn't raising the taxes even when he was.

At the sight of Weed's deeply tormented face, the players gradually quieted as well. Looking at his expression alone, it appeared as if he was tackling a truly enormous problem. When he occasionally grimaced, the players' hearts would drop in alarm.

There were people who had previously met Weed, as well as those who had only heard of him here.

“Was his clinging to coppers while selling sculptures all an act?”

“His incognito skills aren't normal. He went around hiding his identity like that even though he's a player with a high enough level to hunt the King Hydra, y'know.”

“Wargod Weed. Look at his expression, is he gonna wipe us all out because his mood soured?”

“They say that in the Continent of Magic, he was a solitary Warrior who didn't welcome even a little fuss or hassle…”

Once the excitement subsided, the people were struck with an eerie mood.

It was because the Weed from the Continent of Magic was a figure with extreme notoriety!

* * *

In a corner of the square, Merchants were chattering thoughtlessly. They were discussing Weed's misdeeds from the Continent of Magic!

“Soo-il, did he really kill people ever so often?”

“Yeah. Weed's nasty deeds were crazy. I was killed five times myself.”

“Why were you killed? Were you enemies with Weed then?”

Weed could also hear the conversation between the young Merchants. Since they were discussing his history during his Continent of Magic days, he was deeply interested. it was an important conversation because, depending on the crowd's opinion, he could change the taxes as well.

“There was no particular reason. Once for making him wait because I was taking a long time to buy goods at a shop, once for meeting him by a stream, and once for going into a dungeon he was hunting in. The remaining two times were because I couldn't take his misdeeds anymore, so I joined a coalition and died while fighting as a group.”

“He killed people for reasons like that?”

“He didn't *just* kill people, either. It was literally a massacre. He didn't leave anyone alive, even the unarmed or wounded.”

In the Continent of Magic, Weed's notoriety was not limited to monsters alone. Even to players, he was merciless slaughter embodied. With his extremely overwhelming level, amazing skill management, and unique items, he was the strongest player. He trampled on those who challenged him to the point where they couldn't recover, and he simply killed those who were eyesores.

'I didn't differentiate humans from monsters.'

Weed briefly recalled his Continent of Magic days. He killed so much that it was difficult to remember all his opponents separately. He had found absolutely no reason to leave humans alive just because they were players, when he was already killing monsters. He even purposefully sought those who put on airs because they were high leveled players, started a fight, and killed them.

The force of a large guild? He didn't care.

'No matter how well organized they were, everything worked out once I killed them three or four times.'

He used one guild as an example and thoroughly destroyed them. After that, the criticism against him became harsh, and the public opinion of him plummeted. Then he thrashed them again. Without any reserve, he tore them all apart.

After numerous repetitions of thrashing, other guilds also took heed and cowered.

Although coalitions against him were formed several times, he lured them into dungeons and annihilated them one by one.

Weed fought cleverly.

Fighting a group single-handedly was actually an extremely difficult task. He was a demon who took advantage of his surroundings, used items without reserve, and killed his enemies one by one!

The Merchant asked, “Even so, it seems like they don't think too badly of Weed. There aren't many players from the Continent of Magic who would curse Weed.”

The Merchant who had been explaining nodded his head in agreement. “Because it was when the Continent of Magic was gradually losing popularity, something new was necessary. Who wouldn't feel satisfied watching him complete unsolved quests, breakthrough labyrinths, uncover the secrets of mysterious dungeons, and slaying extremely powerful monsters?”

People did not hate Weed.

Even in Royal Road, Weed hunted and quested with unmatched recklessness. Though in truth, he couldn't help but receive requests because of his high Fame. He barely finished them by suffering to near

death, but others could only give up in the middle without making any progress.

For guilds raising excitement with power expansion or players tired of repetitive hunting, Weed was like a fresh beam of light. Even guilds or players who were completely hostile towards Weed could not help but acknowledge that, at least.

“Even the highbrow guilds completely avoided him because they were afraid of getting in a fight with Weed.”

“Was it that bad?”

“He was someone who everyone wanted to become friendly with, even while staying away from him and dying. Someone you wanted to at least imprint your name onto.”

“He must've emitted an incredible atmosphere.”

“If you were hunting in a hunting ground and heard Weed had appeared nearby, you'd get a feeling of goosebumps prickling all over your skin. You wouldn't know how it feels unless you've experienced it.”

You're getting pumped up while hunting with your teammates as you share a peaceful conversation. Then, Weed appears in the vicinity.

A silent and frightening atmosphere.

The problem was not the quest nor the monsters, you'd want to leave your party and go there because you were curious about what Weed was doing.

In actuality, it was to the point where it was difficult to count every individual who had been interested in Weed's actions and had died while following him.

“You'd hear about Weed challenging the quests in the Continent of Magic that looked absolutely impossible, and going into places no one had ever gone to before without even a shred of fear.”

“But there must've been times when he failed, right?”

“Of course. He probably failed a ton of times. But eventually, he succeeded. Only monster remains were left in dungeons Weed had gone through, the most awesome moments must've occurred.”

The records Weed had established in the Continent of Magic continued to spread for a long time.

“So that was Weed.”

“The more I hear, the more surprising and awesome it is. It's definitely fun to hear it from a person who experienced it firsthand.”

“The strongest in the Continent of Magic, Weed. That person is the one standing right there; Morata's Lord.”

The crowd's eyes were filled with respect!

* * *

Weed folded his arms and looked up. As the movement portal quietly emitted blue light, suspense filled the air.

After excruciating agony and inner conflict, he had won over his temptations.

“Not yet. Taxes have to be raised stealthily. So that people can't feel it…”

If he suddenly raised the taxes just because there were more people, he would meet great resistance.

'It also needs justification. To make them think the taxes really *had* to be raised, that there was no helping it, I need a justification they can understand! Without it, they won't even accept a tax increase.'

Having overcome his greed, Weed put his rucksack onto the ground and sat down. Weed was the type of person who placed no value on luxuries. Unlike others, he had never gone to a fancy restaurant or bought a meal for female players. He obtained carving tools or even blacksmithing goods through hunting or gathering and used them self-sufficiently.

The sum he had to invest in Morata to reap a huge profit later was enormous, so he needed lots of money.

MOOOOO!

With a cry, a gentle-looking cow emerged from the portal.

Yellowy was being used as a luggage carrier. Even his back was strapped with countless backpacks filled with japtem, acquired from hunting near the River of Lamentations.

The backpacks he had prepared ahead of time had been filled to the brim, and the large bags he had made with his Tailoring skill were also full.

“It should be somewhere around here…”

Weed rummaged through his backpacks and pulled out a sword.

A sword sharpened to a keen edge!

“This is not ordinary japtem! I'm selling japtem, as well as clothes, armor, and weapons in small quantities!”

The start of his japtem sale!

It only took an instant for the heavy atmosphere in the square to dissipate.

“Ehh, what the hell, he's selling goods.”

“I was alarmed for no reason.”

Because Weed had accumulated such enormous notoriety, even Morata's Soldiers and Knights had appeared, creating a rigid atmosphere. When Weed pulled out a sword on top of it all, the crowd held their breaths in alarm.

Now, although their interest in Weed was just as great as before, the grimness had disappeared and the square's characteristic noisy and

carefree atmosphere returned.

“Excuse me.”

A Merchant who had been doing business nearby bravely spoke up. In front of the movement portal, Weed and Yellowy were positioned in the very middle of the square.

“Yes?”

“Are you really the Wargod Weed?”

“Heh, I'll leave it to your imagination.”

Weed did not deny it. However, the Merchant who had asked nodded his head.

“Looks like you aren't him.”

“He says he's not, right?”

“Yeah. He's not him.”

“…”

That was the judgement the Merchants made on their own. On the other hand, there were quite a few people who believed Weed was the Continent of Magic's Wargod. The people who personally watched Weed's adventure through the broadcast thought differently, and they were also divided based on their judgements of his level or profession. However, the majority of people couldn't decide which side was right and were still on the fence.

The Merchants looked greedily at Weed and Yellowy's backpacks.

“But, ah, you have quite a lot of japtem.”

“That's because I hunted diligently.” Weed replied indifferently as he laid out his japtem. Customers hadn't arrived yet, and he was preparing to do business.

As he gazed avariciously at the laid out japtem, the Merchant proposed, “Would you be willing to sell all that japtem to me? I'll give you a good price for them.”

Weed shook his head. “I will sell them myself.”

“But it'll be better for me, a Merchant, to take care of them. Business is not so easy.”

The Merchant gave him advice, but Weed didn't need to pay attention to him. He had become skilled at business since he was 10 years old. His learning had started by following a grandma selling vegetables in the marketplace!

“Caltrop Antennas! Black Wild Boar Fangs! I don't sell to just anyone. Since they're not cheap japtem, you can just take a look and go.”

Weed began advertising his goods to the gathered players.

“Antennas? Fangs? What kind of japtem are they to be so expensive?”

The prices they reaped when sold at a general goods store were fantastic.

Weed had hunted and gathered japtem exclusive to the River of Lamentations. Since there wasn't anyone else who had gone to the River of Lamentations through the movement portal yet, it was not an exaggeration to say that these products were first-rate specialties right now.

There were truly many things the crowd had wanted to ask while looking at Weed after he appeared through the movement portal.

About the quest and the Wargod Weed!

However, once he started putting out japtem, the people wanting to buy goods rushed in before the curious crowd could start asking.

Both Merchants and Wizards were greatly amazed when they Identified the antennas. It was a material for a magic staff that could amplify lightning. If it was taken to an Enchanter, the antennas could receive a value greater than their weight in gold.

A Magician shouted out the greatest value that he could offer as soon as he checked the information. “I'll buy them! I can buy the antennas for 350 Gold each. All of them!”

“I'll purchase for 533 Gold.”

“539 Gold!”

“I'll buy for 540 Gold.”

“I'll purchase with all the money I have, 555 Gold.”

The values of japtem were usually fixed. However, Merchants could use their Accounting skills to sell goods they had purchased from players for a better price in stores. They could even receive better offers depending on their Intimacy, public contribution, and the donations they had made for the village's development. Magicians could personally process them before handing them over to a Blacksmith.

“Buy for 570 Gold!” shouted a cheeky-looking Merchant with a huge potbelly.

“580 Gold!”

“I'll buy all of them for 600 Gold.”

There was great profit in being the first to sell rare japtem to a store. A sale for the sake of raising Accounting skill and Fame!

Weed ripped off even the Merchants. He successfully sold off all the antennas he had for 620 Gold each, and 320 Gold for the fangs. He was satisfied since it was higher than what he could get from selling at a store.

It was also pricey for the Merchants, but since they could raise their skills and Fame without even selling a specialty item, it was a profit for them.

Weed pulled out another backpack.

“Now, this here is the Embinyu Church Headband. Trophies obtained while doing the Alliance of the Deliverers quest! Those of

you who want it as a souvenir, please stand in line. I am selling them for 15 Gold apiece."

They were headbands embellished with the Embinyu Church's mark. Besides +3 Defense, they had almost no other bonuses. However, they were relatively cheap goods compared to the expensive japtem he had been selling just before.

"That looks good."

"I'll buy one."

"Please give me one as well."

Weed sold the headbands like souvenirs to the crowd. 'As expected, I have to sell them off when the crowd is excited.'

He made discounts and a buy five, get one free deal under the pretext of a special customer appreciation sale.

The headbands also sold out in an instant!

"Then the next thing is…"

The goods Weed put out one after another were japtem that fell greatly in importance! The spoils he had earned from hunting Undead were bones, tattered clothing, and weapons like rusty longswords. Rusted weapons had lowered maximum durability, and they became exponentially weaker if used by Undead.

The Merchants who had been doing business near Weed could only look on in envy at the sight of his goods selling like hotcakes.

"Please wait just one moment, sir."

Weed tidily used his sword sharpening skill and armor cleaning skill to make the exteriors all glossy and smooth.

"These are souvenirs that will draw luck to their owners! This isn't a chance that comes day in and day out. These goods will not be sold after I run out of stock today."

He was selling off items that would never, ever be used as equipment. The leg bone of a Skeleton sold for a whopping 1 Gold!

With the emptied backpacks on his back, Yellowy stealthily left. Then he entered a secluded alley in Morata Square for a secret rendezvous.

His face covered by a robe, a sly man was waiting in the alley.

"You must be Yellowy. I've heard a lot about you."

Mooooooooo!

"Here are the goods. Please tell Weed the profit will be divided exactly 6 to 4."

Yellowy understood and nodded. Then his empty backpacks were filled to the brim with japtem.

The man waiting in the alleyway. His identity was Mapan.

"We can't miss the opportunity to sell off japtem at high prices."

The strategy was to disguise even normal japtem as souvenirs in order to sell and earn more!

Weed even inscribed his name into the bones with his carving knife.

Be happy. Weed.

I wish you happy hunting. Weed.

Remember the fierce battle against the Lord of the Undead; Balkan Demoph, Weed.

To be honest, he hadn't even fought against Balkan. He had only taken the barbarians to subdue a small portion that had broken off from the vast group of Undead!

* * *

Topics about the Wargod Weed were posted on Royal Road's forum.

There were a few people showing him respect for having solved the quests on the Continent of Magic. However, there were more people reporting his wrongdoings.

> — He killed me for asking how much he bought his equipment for!
>
> — He killed me for cutting in front of him in line at a store.
>
> — At least there was a reason why the two of you were killed. I was killed for being in a dungeon that he was going to hunt in.
>
> — He killed me for yawning.
>
> — He killed me just for being a man.
>
> — I died twelve times. In town, in the square, in the hunting ground, no matter where we met. Later, feeling wronged, I asked him why and he told me it was because he didn't like my name.
>
> — What was your name?
>
> — ShittyIdiotWeed.
>
> — You deserved to be killed.

An enormous amount of Weed's misdeeds emerged.

The forum was centered around Weed. Topics that had always been of interest were buried.

> — I was killed over thirty times by Weed. I went at him viciously, you see.
>
> — Thirty times? You're speaking out over that amount? I died over fifty times.
>
> There are probably many people who remember the

player who bothered Weed until the end; Chestnutty.

— Mr. Chestnutty. You probably never got within a knife's length of him, right?

— Heh. People above, don't fight. No matter how much you all died, is it as bad as me? As for me, I was a ranking player within the top 50 in the Continent of Magic. I even had the rare item Apejan's Circlet. After killing me, Weed took that Apejan's Circlet and equipped it.

— I'm jealous.

— To have gotten an item taken from you by Weed… did Weed use that item for long?

— It was an item he equipped even when he was hunting the Black Dragon. Waah!

Misplaced pride!

Because Weed was such a famous player, there were also many high level players related to him. Players who didn't often reveal their whereabouts in Royal Road made comments. Even players who had risen to the Hall of Fame, posted their experiences from their past days in the Continent of Magic, adding to the legends about Weed.

The record of a former Thief who had followed Weed, undiscovered through dungeon exploration until he died was the highlight.

— Dungeon clearing of the very fastest speed!

The sight of him clearing away groups of monsters that surrounded him without fear was enough to give me the creeps.

He certainly had fighting ability, but I had never before seen anyone with such efficiency, they didn't even have any superfluous movements. Even while wounded and falling into traps, Weed pressed onward endlessly.

— What dungeon was that?

— What boss monster appeared?

— I don't know it either. I died in the middle of it because I got discovered by Weed.

While wandering lonesomely through hunting grounds, Weed did not bother with right or wrongs. He would simply kill them if they were an eyesore. He even killed guilds that attacked him, and killed those who annoyed him.

His ruthless infamy had accumulated extensively.

* * *

In CTS Media, massive amounts of funding were lay out an information gathering system in the Versailles Continent.

“We can't fall behind in the news. News is far more important than broadcasts about celebrities.”

The number of people playing Royal Road was growing exponentially. Not only in the Republic of Korea, but all over the world. People who did not enjoy Royal Road were treated as savages. In Africa, the Middle East, and in South America, the craze was amazing. There was nothing more to be said since even the royals of the Arabian lands and Brazil's drug dealers were addicted to Royal Road!

It would seem as though the international players pouring in all at once would cause a considerable amount of confusion, but they quietly enjoyed the new world. Only a portion of the populace clung to extreme growth, like leveling up or item gathering. They settled in the northern, western, and central parts of the Continent. There were many players who possessed no aversion to experiencing the new wealth of experience known as monsters or different races.

'Heroes of the Versailles Continent,' CTS Media's primary program, was even translated and broadcasted in countries all over the world. As Royal Road grew, the sales of the related broadcasts were also expanding rapidly.

“Nothing draws attention like news. A leading program can only become news!”

CTS Media made contracts with foreign broadcasters before their competitors and even had much better terms. They used the fact that their parent company was a global multinational corporation, to pull the strings with their personal connections.

Enormous sums of money flowed in through copyright contracts, and depending on the sales, they even received royalties at regular intervals.

It wasn't just the capsules that international players bought and utilization fees; as the broadcast industry expanded, Royal Road was about to become the Republic of Korea's greatest source of income.

Because CTS was decidedly foremost in commercial marketing, they reinvested the money they had earned into Royal Road. They wouldn't even dare to dream of influencing the board of directors by increasing their Unicorn stock share. Not only CTS, but even their whole company couldn't compare to Unicorn in sales or cash income.

Unicorn's status in the worldwide economy was increasing with time, so only those who had held stocks in the early stages had been struck with sudden wealth.

CTS Media dispatched reports and invested in players for acquiring Royal Road information. Including castle lords, they

persuaded key players using lots of money.

“It would be nice if you did exclusive coverage for our broadcast station alone.”

Most users were easily swayed in front money.

“Is it really okay… for us to take this much money?”

“Of course. And please supply us with information about things that happen within the territory you govern, and please block the actions of personnel from other stations, if possible.”

For guilds that handled regions, they weren't hard requests. It was too much for them to completely blockade the movements of reporters from other broadcasting stations, who moved under hidden identities. However, public coverage acquisition for another station was something that could certainly be stopped. The guilds were only spoken badly for a few days, so it wasn't really a problem.

“We understand, please treat us well.”

CTS Media entered agreements with many lesser lords on the Versailles Continent. However, negotiations did not proceed easily with guilds that had greater power.

One area's rulers had many sources of income. Taxes, bribe money from minor guilds, hunting ground fees, and weapon and armor sales were producing much profit. Prestigious guilds were already steeped in commercial activities, so they were actually managing rather sizeable businesses.

“The contract sum is small, I see.”

“We do not move for sums of this size.”

They had grown to the point where they even ignored calls from station directors. Even though it was a virtual reality, the big lords of the Versailles Continent held enough authority and power. Even broadcasting stations couldn't deal with such lords carelessly. If they were rubbed the wrong way, coverage wouldn't proceed well, so they had to deal with being in the shoes of the weak. They couldn't even report the misdeeds of huge guilds heedlessly.

“We contacted just about everyone in the Central Continent… how is it going with the South and West?”

“The casting will end for players we have contact information for sometime between today and tomorrow.”

“How are their responses?”

“Perhaps it's because there were rumors about trade in the central continent, but they are deciding quickly. I think the casting will end soon because they are many large guilds.”

“That's not bad news.”

There were many differences between the Western Versailles Continent and the other regions. Powerful centralized nations were positioned in the Central Continent. They were nations that boasted

rich lands, mines, and populations. Emerging nations with outstanding potential were positioned in the East, and the South developed magic. There was vigorous pioneering and adventuring in the North. Because the Versailles Continent's area was so large, there were still places where people had yet to set foot in, even in the Central Continent.

The West had a strong nationalist disposition, so it was mostly settled by guilds that recruited native people. In other regions, even if you started in a specific city or village, you could escape the region's influence simply by moving your hunting ground. However, you could not do so in the West, which had many grasslands and deserts. There were many strong Warriors who were tied by blood to nomadic people, so they boasted strong cohesion. Excluding wanderers in the Central Continent. For the most part, guild issues were decided by the native people. Their strength was inferior in comparison to the Central Continent, but the size and numbers of individual guild territories were not small.

“That's a relief. Who are we contacting in the North?”

The Executive Director was personally heading a meeting in the CTS Media conference room.

“The representative of the North would be Weed's Morata. In the past, we had a business relationship.”

“Who contacted him? Who was the person in charge?”

“The President's Secretary, Yoon Na-hee.”

“Oh? Why did the President's Secretary herself contact him?”

“There was the matter of the President personally deciding to purchase the Continent of Magic account. The casting for the 8 Heroes program was also entrusted to her.”

“It's really such a shame. If we had just kept broadcasting, it would have been a big hit…”

The 8 Heroes had managed to bring in decent ratings. However, they had stopped starring Weed because the initial response hadn't been good. After that, Weed had then won the battles against the True Blood Vampires, the Undead Legion, and the Bone Dragon.

Because their competitor KMC Media had gotten to broadcast those instead, there had even been an incident where PD in charge had written a letter of resignation. CTS Media's President had inevitably noticed.

“For now, we'll have Ms. Yoon Na-hee contact Weed.”

“I will take the steps to do so.”

Chapter 2: Blacksmith of Magic Swords
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Kuruso, the city of Dwarven craftsmen, had become famous because of Weed and was being visited by many players. They were impressed when they saw Kendellev's restored water sculptures and went around looking at the cool weapons and armor.

“Hah, I could buy it if I had a little more money… Mister Dwarf, can't you cut the price down a little?”

“Not even one copper.”

Haggling players and Dwarves could easily be found. The goods sold by the Dwarves in Kuruso were extremely expensive, even for accessories. People couldn't easily decide to buy. For Merchants, accessories were more valuable trade goods than jewels or gold. They could be sold in any village, and they were good since one could receive a higher price by treating the residents well.

There were Dwarves who liked that Kuruso had become a bustling village, but some Dwarves didn't leave the smithy and were engrossed in their craft.

“Hmmm.”

Fabio sharpened the completed sword on the grindstone.

Raasp raasp

> The sword has been sharpened to a keen edge.
> Sword Grinding skill activated!
> Damage has increased by 41%.

The Sword Grinding skill!

It wasn't a skill only Weed could use, but a technique that could be grasped by any Intermediate Blacksmith. Of course, since Fabio had never learned Tailoring, he didn't know techniques such as Ironing and Hand Washing.

“It has become quite sharply honed.”

Fabio turned the sword back and forth, trying to find flaws. The blade was slick enough to perfectly reflect the bearded Dwarf's face!

The most famous player on the Versailles Continent among Blacksmiths was Fabio. His specialty was perceived as armor and shield production, but he was concealing the fact that he actually made swords.

Whenever one of his swords occasionally went out into the world, they created a sensation. They were to the point where people engaged in searches to find the Blacksmith who made the sword.

Weaponry of an entirely different level from the works of ordinary Blacksmiths!

It was normal to acquire weapons through hunting once you reached a certain high level, but the swords made with Fabio's devotion were enough to incite wars between countless players. Having an excellent blade changed the hunting speed. The obsession for weapons and armor in Royal Road was fearsome.

Fabio made swords and occasionally released them into the world for fun, but he thoroughly hid the fact that they were of his make. He moved so secretly that he could be mistaken for a Blacksmith in retirement.

“The Sword Grinding skill is really quite good.”

Fabio set down the sword, satisfied.

It was only temporary, but the skill raised damage. At Advanced Blacksmithing 8 and Advanced Sword Grinding 6, he could even bring up a sword's damage by a maximum of 85 %. However, the side effects were severe.

“If the sharpness is raised excessively, the sword's durability falls quickly and it goes bad easily.”

Used conservatively, there was no problem with 40 % damage or so.

“A finished sword is truly beautiful.”

Previously an ordinary salary-man in real life, as soon as Royal Road appeared, he had been immediately captivated. There were many professions, but the one that had moved him was Blacksmithing.

One could say that, in the very beginning, Royal Road was chaos. The majority of the players didn't even know how to fight Rabbits well. The appearance of a single Orc would send them fleeing all the way to the village gates, and instances where scores of players died together were not uncommon.

It was a time when one ordinary longsword brought enormous envy and jealousy.

Fabio decided to choose the Blacksmith.

“It was a good choice.”

He couldn't leap into the fray of battle, but he didn't regret his choice. He improved his Blacksmithing skill through concentration after making a decision faster than others.

After becoming the most outstanding Blacksmith in the Dwarven village, there was no end to his work opportunities. As his name spread to the city, customers sought him from afar to entrust work to him.

There was always more demand than supply in the field of Blacksmithing. For the best Blacksmith, there was nothing more to be said. He accumulated money while taking enormous service fees,

which he then reinvested into acquiring ores to make armor.

A profession that handled and hammered red-hot iron in front of a blazing furnace! Though it was lonely work, he endured and continued to forge.

With the best materials as a basis, he made contracts with upper tier players and supplied armor to them. As he made appearances on television, his supporters increased enormously. He was an idol figure for beginner Blacksmiths.

It wasn't publicly known, but Fabio was the true leader of the guild called “Iron Road.” He managed his guild while making them equipment. With more friends than enemies, he even wielded both tangible and intangible influence. Among players of the Dwarven race, there weren't many who could refuse a single word of his.

“Still, the worth of a Blacksmith is in making good weapons.”

CLANG!

Fabio roughly tossed the sword he had just crafted aside. Swords were piled up like mountains around him.

“This time, again, the sword fell short of my expectations. The ultimate sword that can cut through anything, no matter what it is. I must make a sword befitting of being called the best in the Versailles Continent.”

A Blacksmith's hidden skill set!

While walking the path of a Blacksmith, Fabio had learned unique techniques.

> Mineral Smelting Advanced 3 (25 %): A technique where ores made of various materials can be completely refined without impurities for use.
>
> Can be called a technique that forms the basis of a Blacksmith. Must understand the will of fire, air, and metal.

Among Blacksmith's hidden skills, Mineral Smelting was the very first one he acquired. It was a technique Fabio had learned when he changed his profession to Ironblood Blacksmith.

“Aahh, it makes me shudder even now to think about that process of changing profession.”

In order to change professions as a Blacksmith, he had suffered to death in the smithy. Though he could have gone to the Blacksmith Guild like other players did and made a few weapons or armor to change professions, he did not do so.

Wanting to see it with his own eyes and hammer with his own hands before changing profession, he spent more than a month of his precious time doing chores in the smithy during the initial stages of Royal Road.

The profession changing quest he came to obtain through

gruesome process!

“I'll never be able to forget the 'Joys, Sorrows, and Tears of a Blacksmith' quest for the rest of my life.”

In order to change his profession, he had to busily run between several villages with his short and stubby Dwarven legs to successfully complete requests. Then, he had to be formally employed by the smithy to receive the quests at last.

A Blacksmith could fulfil quests not only in the guild, but also in the smithy. He tried making not just one type, but many different kinds of equipment. He accumulated Fame as he completed quests as they came in and also made money. Through such quests, he acquired the Equipment Enhancement skill.

> Equipment Enhancement Advanced 1 (16 %): The potential of equipment can be drawn out in the hands of a Blacksmith.
>
> Through countless failures, equipment can be modified.

The skill that made Fabio famous!

He learned this skill around the time when he reached Intermediate Blacksmithing.

There was a saying: “Never show all your cards.” If one were to recklessly publicize their full skill on the Versailles Continent, where there were never-ending wars for supremacy, they could easily get dragged into a dispute or lose their life.

Fabio intentionally hid the fact that he could also strengthen swords in addition to armors through Equipment Enhancement. If he had also strengthened swords, he could have made money by the buckets at the time. He made more money in one day than he previously did in one month through armor enhancement alone. Even considering the fact that, besides Merchants, Blacksmiths enjoyed the most lucrative profession, it was an enormous profit.

However, if it was known that Blacksmiths had abilities to that extent, more people would choose to be Blacksmiths.

“My competitors would increase, and they would never let me be.”

Fabio only enhanced armor to a sufficient level. After all, what he wanted was not money, but reaching the peak in his Blacksmithing skills and making the best weapons and armor.

After making money with the Equipment Enhancement skill, he was able to use minerals without limit. He went as far as to purchase the Thor Kingdom's mithril, iron, and silver ores in bulk.

His Blacksmithing skill reached Advanced.

And a hidden Blacksmithing skill he acquired through quests and his connections!

Ego Sword Production Beginner 8 (49 %): Can infuse a soul into equipment. However, it requires a large amount of Mana and a special soul.

Results improve if made in a graveyard.

Ego swords.

Fabio experimentally tried imparting souls into the swords he had.

Ding!

All the Mana you possess has been used.

An ego has been granted to the sword.

The sword's properties have changed.

17 % reduction in damage.

65 % reduction in durability.

It now has magical properties.

Depending on the Ego Sword Production skill level and the Blacksmith's magic prowess, the reduction to damage and durability will decrease and more magical properties will be granted.

Training Sword

Durability: 25/25.

Damage: 31–46.

A basic longsword. It is well balanced and made from tempering high-quality iron. As a crafted weapon, it possesses characteristics that can only be seen in a weapon made by a Blacksmith with advanced skill.

A work made by Blacksmith Fabio.

Ego Sword. A goblin's soul is sealed within. The soul is in an unawakened state.

Restriction: Level 180 Limited to Swordsmen, Knights, and Warrior professions.

Options: Lightning Attribute Damage +2.

Luck +15.

He had great expectations as it was an ego sword. He had expected something amazing, something impressive to come out!

“It's a huge failure.” Fabio scowled.

An ego sword possessed its own self awareness and was a weapon that steadily grew through hunting. For example, a sword with a damage of 40 could increase to 70 or 80 with hunting. It could also

unleash certain defensive magic on its own initiative.

A skill that exceeded the limitations of a weapon!

However, there were severe downfalls. Compared to a normally made sword, the damage and durability were too greatly reduced.

“The magical property is nothing much either.”

As a pure Blacksmith, Fabio invested most of his stats into Strength, Agility, Stamina, and Concentration, since it was important to be able to hammer strongly and accurately. Perhaps because his Wisdom and Intelligence were low, he had an insignificant amount of Mana, and he didn't even learn any magic. Maybe that was why, but a completed ego sword could only unleash basic magic, and possessed a low amount of Mana as well.

And most importantly, the ego couldn't talk or remember previous battles.

That was because his Ego Sword Production skill was low leveled and he lacked magical prowess.

“Still, since you never know…”

As an experiment, Fabio made his daughter sell the created ego sword in secret so he could keep track of the ego sword's growth. However, the sword met the fate of being thrown away after being used to some extent by beginner or intermediate players. Even if it was an ego sword, from the exterior it only appeared to be a magic item with one or two defensive options attached.

One person thought something was strange and posted on the forum.

> — Something amazing has happened.
>
> This weapon, which I picked up on the road, has the power of lightning. It has a maximum damage of 31 to 46. It's an item with lightning damage +2, but when I identified it to repair it after hunting for a week, the minimum and maximum damages had both increase by 1, and the lightning damaged increased to 3.
>
> I'm now thinking of switching to another sword, but… what do you think?

The replies to his post:

> — Short term memory loss.
>
> — Don't drink too much alcohol.
>
> — That sword, can you show it to me once? I'm not asking you to just give it to me, I'll be sure to return it.
>
> — I'm a beginner without a sword, please sell it for 300 Gold.

“It'll be hard for Ego Sword Production to show any satisfying results if it's not at Intermediate or Advanced level.”

Although the Dwarves were a race that naturally excelled at Blacksmithing techniques, he did think the skill didn't suit him since his magical ability was poor. An Elf or Human Blacksmith would have been able to make a slightly better ego sword.

It was really a shame, but Fabio was giving up on Ego Sword Production.

> Magic Sword Production Beginner 1 (3 %): You can create a magic sword.
>
> The completed magic sword can show a special ability depending on the characteristics of the material. Can only be used if it is imprinted with magic.

The skill Fabio currently had the most expectations for!

“I'll make the sword imprinted with the best magic.”

It wasn't impossible. Materials with magic power could be acquired in small amounts from places deep within dungeons or by hunting high-leveled monsters. He was striving to make the ultimate magic sword with those materials.

“A true magic sword is made by a Blacksmith, not a Magician.”

A Magician could invest all their Mana into a sword to grant magic that could be used a few times. However, a Blacksmith created a sword imprinted with such magic.

It was a secret skill Fabio had earned after clearing a request he had discovered after finishing a fearsome number of Blacksmithing quests.

> Blacksmith of Magic Swords
>
> The secret art of a Dwarven Blacksmith who hated Akryong (Evil Dragon) Kaybern.
>
> Normal swords cannot wound Akryong Kaybern's hide, and it is foolhardy to fight a Dragon with magic.
>
> The Dwarven Blacksmith believed the sole way to hunt Akryong Kaybern was to blast him with magic after piercing him with a sword.
>
> In order to acquire the method of producing a magic sword, a Dwarven Blacksmith must explore the vanished dungeon.
>
> Difficulty: Blacksmith Profession
> Quest Restriction: Limited to Dwarven Blacksmiths

It was a profession quest he cleared by secretly leading his guild there.

A magic sword had greater damage than a regular sword, and it also grew by gaining bloodlust every time it absorbed blood. Since it had fewer ego sword-like uses, it could actually be a better method for creating a sword to be used as a weapon.

CLANG, CLANG, CLANG!

Fabio silently hammered the steel.

“An absolute weapon, nearly perfect armor; only with such works will a Blacksmith be able to stand at the center of the Versailles Continent.”

Since other Blacksmiths on the Versailles Continent were hard at work, even at this very moment, he could not rest.

On the extensive Versailles Continent, Fabio was a great figure who was restraining and concealing his true self.

* * *

The Crimson Mercenary Guild.

A guild proudly showing off its force on the Versailles Continent. Only Mercenaries over level 280 were permitted to join. They operated Mercenary guild branches in every kingdom, and the entirety of the wealthy Nemere Lakeside basin area was under their control. They were the rulers of a vast region, possessing 5 castles and 28 villages.

The Crimson Mercenary Guild was meeting in Haryun Castle, the closest castle to the Nemere Lakeside.

“It's Wargod Weed.”

“Guild master, shouldn't we subjugate him?

The Crimson Mercenary Guild's chief, Maren, nodded.

“There's plenty of reasons to subjugate Weed.”

The glory of fighting the Wargod Weed and winning!

For the Crimson Mercenary Guild, which sought dominance over the entire Versailles Continent, it was something to be desired.

However, there were some Mercenaries who opposed it while shaking their heads.

“Since the Continent of Magic, he is an idol-like figure for Mercenaries. It's too much for us, the representatives of Mercenaries, to subjugate him.”

“There needs to be a justification. If we attack him with no reason at all, how is it any different from thieves who steals from another?”

“How is a justification important? Think about the fame! It's a chance to gain the fame of having won a fight against the *Wargod*

Weed."

"Only time will tell if it'll become fame or dishonor."

20 top ranking Mercenaries were arguing, without budging an inch from their opinions.

Maren, the Chief of the Mercenary guild, had been greedily considering subjugating Weed at first. But, after hearing the opposing viewpoints, he was a little hesitant.

There was glory in it. The title of being the player who had killed the Wargod Weed was very charismatic. On the other hand, they would earn the hostility of the players who revered Weed.

Even former Continent of Magic players didn't dislike Weed. His fame on Royal Road was reaching a peak among general players. As far as fame went, Weed had risen to the ranks of Bardray, whose Hermes Guild was officially the strongest. There was no knowing if striking Weed, who succeeded in impossible quests and was becoming an idol for players, would be profitable for their guild or not.

Naphgel, one of the top Mercenaries, said, "How in the world can you say that bringing out our whole guild and trampling Weed is a chance to gain fame? Is there anyone among us who is confident they can win a one on one fight against Weed?"

"…"

At that, the entire gathering fell silent. Even Maren couldn't say anything in response to that.

Weed had never publicized his level or skills before.

"It'll be tough if we assume he's a normal Sculptor. Who can fight like Weed in the Palrangka battle?"

"…"

No matter how you looked at it, his ability to swing his sword in a battle, with only a meager chance of success, was due to his mental fortitude. Regular players revered Weed because of his courage to throw down everything and take up the challenge.

"Just considering his fighting ability, there aren't many people here who are confident they can win against him. And his real profession may not be a Sculptor."

"Naphgel, you mean…?"

"We can't be off-guard just because he's a Sculptor. With his use of Necromancer magic and the physical fighting prowess he's shown, there's really no telling what his profession is."

Maren was also a ranker within the top 50 of all of Royal Road, but he didn't know his opponents' abilities at all. Considering the fighting ability Weed had shown when fighting the Bone Dragon and the quests he had completed, it was, honestly, daunting.

'We fight as a guild. But honestly… I have no confidence in being able to do a quest alone like that. And, apart from level, his battle

sense is at least several times greater than mine.'

There wasn't much information known about Weed.

Being defeated in a one on one fight with many variables would be very damaging. If a ranker of Maren's level died, it would be extremely difficult to regain the lost level and proficiency. He could even be culled from the breathlessly tight competition between rankers. Moreover, a fight with Weed would definitely be put on broadcast, and videos would be posted as well. If he was defeated in such a fight, he had to bear the knowledge that he could also lose his fame.

The image was being drawn in Maren's head!

'He'd tear our guild members apart like tissue paper, and the Ice Dragon, Phoenix, Wyvern… and if he used that uber rare Necromancer magic too, it'd be a big pain in the ass.'

The might of Necromancer magic was publicly acknowledged. There were fierce complaints from the people who actually tried raising a Necromancer about how the class's Stamina was low and that they were hard to raise, but because of the terrifying sight Weed had shown in the broadcast, it was a profession many people aspired to be.

'A Necromancer's magic… his fighting ability is truly nothing short of being called a God of War.'

Weed, laughing brutally and slicing Maren's throat apart in the public eye…

“Ahem.”

Maren couldn't take action recklessly.

“I've no thought of losing, but it's a difficult issue, since we can't ignore the 'what if' either.”

“And, if we send an expedition all the way to the North, we could be giving the other guilds, who are waiting to pounce on us, a good opportunity.”

As powerful as the Crimson Mercenary Guild was, they had as many enemies. They were in a position where they couldn't send out their main force indefinitely.

“Are you saying our guild could be attacked while trying to catch Weed?”

“It's a definite possibility. Our territory will inevitably become vulnerable while our attack force is all the way in the North. From the viewpoint of other guilds, don't you think it's more reasonable to aim for our large, profitable territory than the fame of catching Weed?”

They had many Mercenary guild competitors, and there was no law preventing them from joining forces to attack.

It was an issue with all sorts of worries for the Crimson Mercenary Guild.

* * *

Weed was left with just a few things after he disposed of all the japtem. He planned to find owners for the Sophia's Greatspear, Large Crystal Gemstone, Jorudia's Signet, the diamonds, and Isuren's Magic Weapon elsewhere.

“It'll be good to sell off the Large Crystal Gemstone to nobles after I process it with sculpting and make it a large ornament… it wouldn't be bad to use it when I'm Light Sculpting, either. I'll have to sell the other items through the auction site or the Dark Gamer's Union.”

A dresser and dining table made with the large crystal! They would be hard to sell in the North, but they were luxury goods he could sell at extremely high prices in a Central Continent kingdom.

After selling the miscellaneous items, Weed walked along the streets of Morata with Yellowy.

The residents recognized him and greeted him first.

“Welcome, my Lord.”

“My Lord, they say you have successfully completed an impressive request once again… Please be sure to tell us the story later. My son says he wants to be just like you when he grows up.”

“Count of Morata, I am a Merchant from Rintle Kingdom. It is an honor to meet such a famous man.”

Because of the enormous Fame he had accumulated in the River of Lamentations, even NPCs from the Central Continent responded to him warmly.

“The apples have ripened beautifully in our front-yard. We've saved the most delicious apples for you, my Lord, so please be sure to try them.”

A woman handed him apples by the basketful! It was a fruit basket she had taken out to sell to the market, but when she saw the Lord, she had given it to him on the spot.

Weed received the fruit basket and took a big bite out of a ripe, red apple.

“Yellowy, you eat one too.”

He threw Yellowy a worm-eaten apple. The bull stuck out his tongue to lick it, then opened his mouth wide and crunched into it.

Weed solemnly proceeded to give it a lesson.

“Yellowy, the way people are, they help each other when times are tough. Don't you think things like these are all because of our daily actions?”

Yellowy didn't believe him at all, but he just nodded; he was busy eating the apples in the basket.

Morata had become very different from the last time he had come. Mystical figures were sculpted on the sturdy bridge on the

crossway to the Lord's castle. Sculptors, Artists, and Painters had come to Morata and were enriching the city.

“We're building a shopping district!”

“I'm a Painter, please take me with you.”

“A Sculptor is participating, leave the ceiling to me!”

When a construction quest appeared, all the artists joined in to construct a beautiful building.

With its crystal clear river and lake, Morata's attractions continued to increase.

There was even a sizeable ornament hanging from Morata's spire, visible from the square.

Adventurer Spenson's hair ornament of Ankia!

> Lady Ankia's Hair Ornament, City Ornament
> Durability: 80/80.
>
> A gold ornament with outstanding archaeological value.
> Options:
> The entire village's commercial development speed increases by 2 %.
> Adventure related experience increases by 1.5 %.

Spenson was a very distinguished adventurer in Royal Road; the hair ornament he had excavated after coming to the North was displayed in Morata.

Adventurers could arrange or publicize a special kind of excavated item in a town. They sometimes sold such items for very high prices, but the adventurer received a massive increase in Fame if they donated it to a town. There was also the effect of their intimacy with the townspeople increasing instantaneously, and they could also buy goods very cheaply — at much better prices than an average Merchant would get. Moreover, their popularity with the employees at a tavern was the best! The residents would also go out of their way to find the adventurer in order to offer them quests.

Spenson had predicted that the future Morata would grow into the central city of the North and had left his excavated item here.

Returning to Morata after a long time, Weed could feel the vivid liveliness of adventure.

“It's beautiful.”

“Aren't you glad we came here?”

“Yeah. The ambience is good.”

One of the changes was the sight of many couples swarming like cockroaches in the vicinity of the bridge and buildings, which boasted great views. Ever since beginners began starting in Morata, many couples had formed. Love, which sprouted while hunting rabbits and

foxes!

The consumption and sale of lots of goods by beginners became the pivot of Morata's economic development. There was no main cause for the influx of beginners that rivaled that of Versailles Continent's eastern Rosenheim Kingdom, and made Morata overflow with liveliness. It was a common sight to see beginners with their starting equipment and a wooden sword eating 10 pieces of barley bread sparingly while doing quests in the village.

Morata, a delightful city full of vitality!

The growth in Morata while Weed had been away was dazzling. As beginners appeared, the shops also multiplied quickly. They weren't sellers of cheap baubles, but decent, high class stores.

Merchants and people who wanted to build a house had been stingy with artwork at first.

“What help would such a thing be…”

“Just build it quickly, quickly. Make the warehouse a little wider as well.”

However, buildings with outstandingly artistic design boasted much better business. Even if they were the same general store, people gathered in the beautiful building, and so in Morata, investing in sculptures and paintings was no longer just a luxury.

Sculptors, Painters, and Architects gathered to make the city incomparably colorful.

“The song that will be played today is called 'A Night in a Goblin Dungeon'.”

Every street corner was decked out with a small stage for performances. In a narrow space, about five steps wide, Bards sang songs and played instruments. It was a sight that could normally only be found in the City of Artists, Rhodium.

In Morata, Artists, Bards, and Architects were respected.

It was the result of the haphazard investment of the money Weed had shed blood and tears for into art by the Village Elder. Other cities or castles spent 0 %, or maybe just 1 %, on cultural development, but Morata was committing several times as many funds.

There were many beginner Bards, and with the visits of Bards whose names were well-known throughout the Versailles Continent, the lively music became one of Morata's charms.

The tavern, smithery, weapon shop, and armor shop were crowded with beginners and players. There were many players in the streets, as though there was a festival.

“I wonder how much has changed while I away away. Region Information Window!”

Ding!

Morata Region

An area that once belonged to the Niflheim Empire.

This region is the most prosperous in the Northern Versailles Continent and continues to develop. Merchants actively carry out trade, and there are many customers in the stores. Art is spread throughout, attracting tourists. Due to culture, there is an influx of population and the creation of new jobs. The newly arriving population is showing boosts in all jobs.

Military: 47
Economy: 821
Culture: 1,130
Technology: 310
Religious Influence: 89
Regional Politics: 22
Influence on nearby regions: 41 %
The former Niflheim Empire's influence: 3.6% (Deeply influences areas related to military, economy, culture, technology, religion, population, and quests)
City Development: 106
Sanitation: 41
Security: 69 %

The water facilities have been cleaned, and new houses built. However, they are still inadequate to fulfil the needs of the explosively increasing residents.

New residents want a greater investment in security. They want to expand the village's territory to a wider region and increase the number of monster subjugations.

There are residents who vaguely remember the festival that took place a long time ago. The large number of sculptures are bringing happiness to the lives of the residents.

There is a slight insufficiency of paintings. The endless trust and support for Artists is heightening the village's dignity. The residents have become proud of having more artworks than other villages and want to continue to invest in related guilds.

The tailoring industry's techniques continue to be passed down. With the appearance of many new Tailors, the prospects for the future are bright.

Techniques for handling iron are still basic; Blacksmiths producing weapons or armor are very inexperienced.

The region believes in the Faith of Freya. The residents' faith is firm and will not sway easily. Moderate hedonism and fertility are increased as a result of the Church of Freya's influence; the people show a diligent nature.

Specialities: Leather and cloth. Art.
Territory's Total Population: 168,101
Monthly Tax Revenue: 178,045 Gold

Village Operating Expenditure Breakdown:
- Military: 5%
- Economic Development: 32%
- Cultural Investment Costs: 14%
- Requests and Monster Subjugations: 9%
- Town Maintenance: 31%
- Freya Church Offerings: 9%

The explosive increase in tax revenue as a consequence of the population increase, commercial development, and the influx of Mercenaries and Adventurers!

“Heh.”

Weed made a straight face. The corners of his mouth threatened to rise, and the muscles in his face spasmed as he tried to hold back a smile. He was so happy he wanted to roll around on the ground, but he had to maintain his lordly image, especially in times like this, to save face.

“It's nothing much. Tsk, tsk… It's such a primitive and rural village.”

Weed, who was rejoicing with furrowed brows and quivering cheeks, revealed a rotten expression!

It was particularly good that the monthly offerings to the Church of Freya had been reduced from 15 % to 9 %.

“Seems like it was automatically adjusted as the income sum increased.”

More was spent on offerings, but the percentage had decreased with the increase in income.

As the budget increased, there were steady investments into culture, military power, economic development, and village maintenance. Since there was also an explosive increase in beginners, Morata could now be called a respectable, mid-size city.

“Granted, I'm still not getting much tax money compared to the number of people…”

Even on the street Weed was on, 86 out of 100 people were beginners.

Low taxes, adventure, free hunting grounds, and the Tower of Light sculpture. Beginner players were skyrocketing thanks to the positive feel Morata radiated.

“The more these beginners raise their levels, the greater the tremendous growth in taxes!”

He had rosy hopes for the future. They were happy thoughts only a Lord could harbor.

Of course, Morata also had many disadvantages.

There were no other churches besides the Church of Freya. It was very unfortunate that players who wanted to become Clerics had a narrow selection.

Technological development was low, and the quality of weapons and armor was low because there weren't many Blacksmiths. Since the amount produced each day was also limited, all the weapon and armor stores were sold out by morning. The beginners had a lot of complaints because even the beginner weapons in stores had to be sold at premium prices. Mapan aimed for that niche market and was mostly importing weapons to earn big bucks.

Weed didn't worry too much. “To deal with the scarcity, Blacksmiths will probably increase later.”

To do things like adjust weapons, maintain armor, or reinforce gear, a Blacksmith's existence was necessary! Since Blacksmiths were receiving as much respect as Clerics, there would gradually be more of them.

Despite many shortcomings, the beginners, who loved adventures, were growing while helping each other out.

Weed also stepped outside the village boundaries. In the breadbasket, wheat and barley were growing rapidly. The wheat, blessed with fertility by the Church of Freya Priests, had so many grains that their stems started to bend. There was also a significant number of people who held pickaxes and were going off to mine in the nearby mountains.

“I've got to earn at least a copper.”

“We need money to live, dear.”

“We can't even hunt as much as we want with the weapon prices this expensive.”

“The weapon prices are still better — the armor prices are really unspeakable.”

“Phew, maybe it wasn't a good idea for me to choose the defensive Warrior. I'm gonna be hunting with a Freya Church Priest anyways.”

Even beginners were carrying pickaxes and were on their way to the mines. Even if one weren't a miner, pickaxing could be done by anyone, especially by Warrior, Swordsmen, or Knight wannabes with

robust physiques. Beginners were going to the mines with slumped shoulders in order to earn money.

“This is a highly desirable sight.”

The corners of Weed's mouth rose at last. The flawless re-emergence of that rotten smile!

That the exploitation was rolling smoothly was no different from evidence that Morata's economy was healthy.

Chapter 3: The Lord of Morata

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The Lord of Morata

Yoon Na-hee was buoyant with expectation. “It's an opportunity to meet with him in person.”

A meeting with Lee Hyun!

They couldn't make a contract with just three phone calls, so this time she was going to take the contract form herself after making an appointment.

Even though she was an employee at the level of working in a President's secretary office, she had never met someone who had made as strong of an impression as Lee Hyun had. Simply thinking of Lee Hyun was enough to make her heart tremble.

“He is someone who thinks of 3 billion (~3 million dollars) as chump change on the street.”

In their first phone call, he had brusquely hung up even when he was told his account had been auctioned at a sum of 3 billion, 9 million Won.

Wasn’t he truly the ideal specimen of a man that Yoon Na-hee had always dreamt of?! She still couldn’t forget the refreshing shock she’d gotten then.

They had shared short conversations together as she took charge of the casting for the 8 Heroes program as well. At that time, Lee Hyun's level had only been 219. Yoon Na-hee was a player of Royal Road as well, and she had actually been at a higher level than him.

But even making light of him lasted for only a moment. The True Blood Vampire quest, the quest with the Immortal Legion battle, hunting the Bone Dragon, and even seizing the Embinyu Fortress!

Yoon Na-hee only saw him through the videos of another broadcaster — the manly, so very dashing sight of him commanding all the Orcs and Dark Elves as the Orc Karichwi! She was such an avid fan that she printed out an enlarged picture of Orc Karichwi and pasted it on her wall.

“Hmm, would it be okay to call him out of the blue?”

Yoon Na-hee abruptly decided to call him offhandedly. She did so because her position in the President's secretary office and looks of her caliber made her welcome to anyone and everyone. However, once she was actually about to have a phone call with Lee Hyun, she was so nervous that it was hard to speak.

Yoon Na-hee prepared herself and dialed in Lee Hyun's phone number. The receiver picked up the call before the bell rang twice.

Click!

“Hello, this is Yoon Na-hee. You remember me, right?”

She began speaking with an intimate, yet meltingly honeyed voice. She worried for a moment about what she would do if the person on the other end wasn't Lee Hyun, but fortunately it was the right person.

— Who is it?

Lee Hyun's curt voice came through the call. The already tense Yoon Na-hee could not help but be overwhelmed.

“That, I am Yoon Na-hee.”

Since this was their third call, there was an understanding that he would at least remember her name.

— So what?

“……”

— I'm busy so please don't keep calling.

— Beeeeeeeep —

Lee Hyun had hung up.

* * *

On the hill where Weed had sculpted the Tower of Light in the past, was crowded with visitors even in broad daylight. There were tourists who were looking at the Tower of Light, while going as far as to wait for the evening to come. There were several sculptures Weed had made on the hill, and beginner Sculptors also brandished their skills to make works of art in the empty spaces.

It was worthy of being called an excellent sculpture park. This hill had already become quite famous in the Versailles Continent as the Light Park. Moreover, a fabulous view of Morata village and the Lord's Castle could be seen from the hill! The pretty buildings and the Goddess Freya Statue were visible from above.

Weed went up to that place with Yellowy.

“It's the Lord of Morata.”

“Lord? Then he's the Sculptor who sculpted the Tower of Light.”

“It's the Wargod Weed.”

As Weed went up the hill, the tourists who recognized him shouted out. Weed went right past them, took a position on the hill of sculptures, and pulled out his sculpting knife.

'I have to make something necessary for the quest.'

He had felt his limitations even while doing the Alliance of the Deliverer quest. His stats were higher than others because he was a Sculptor, but his fighting ability fell somewhat short. Even if he were to make up for it with Sculpting Blade or other skills, he was in a

shaky situation considering the quest he had in front of him.

'I can't even use the Power of the Deliverer anymore, and if another enemy like Balkan or the King Hydra shows up, I'll lose for sure.'

It was a battle Weed had used all his cards to fight in. He had entirely used up the Power of the Deliverer that had been in the wand, and the Copper Plate of Rest's durability had fallen, so he couldn't issue the Sentence of Death. He had to complete the 2nd and 3rd steps of the quest as well, but all his cards were exhausted.

He had suffered to death completing the 1st step of the S difficulty quest, so there would be nothing more mortifying than failing the 2nd and 3rd steps.

Slice, slice.

Rocks were cut with every movement of the sculpting knife.

There were many sculptures Weed had thought of making. The Church of Freya did not shun other religions. Therefore, he was planning on making a statue of the God of Lugh, who matched well with Freya. The Church of Lugh revered brightness and was the natural enemy of monsters that attacked under the cover of darkness. It wouldn't be bad to have an Idol of Lugh, even if only to improve public security.

[T/N: Lugh is pronounced as “Lu”, he is the Celtic hero of the Sun God.]

'Durability has to be good for a huge statue, so I've gotta make the foundation with stone.'

Weed quickly cut the rock that would become the sculpture's foundation. A sculpture similar in size to the Tower of Light was being made! Statues of Lugh were set up all across the Versailles Continent. Lugh wasn't vague in appearance like Goddess Freya, so it did not take long to sculpt.

“The really important part starts from this moment onwards.”

Weed took a deep breath. The materials were so precious that they made him bead up with cold sweat, but an investment in the sculpture was necessary.

He was at Advanced Sculpting 6. If he made just a few more sculptures, he would soon reach level 7.

“It's really a shame, but…”

Weed sorted the metal fragments he had acquired at the Embinyu Fortress. Excluding the blacksmithing materials with high solidity, he melted the broken metal shards.

“Aahhh, precious things…”

Glowing yellow, the molten gold was completed.

When a Blacksmith improved their skill, they could paint on a thin layer of gold. In technical terms, gilt!

“I won't even be able to paint half of it with this much…” Even after melting all the metal shards in Weed's possession, it was slightly insufficient to paint the entirety of the huge statue. “Should I try mixing in a few impurities?”

Weed shook his head. It would deal a blow to the sculpture if the gold's purity was lowered.

“The gold has to be 24k no matter what.”

Weed melted in the ancient gold coins and the gold bars he had acquired from hunting.

“Aaahh, these precious things.”

Every time he stirred with a rod, the molten gold was mixed as it let off an indescribable luster. For Weed, who had only ever stirred watery soup, it was a luxury among luxuries.

The tourists couldn't repress their astonishment.

“Is *Sculptor Weed* making an enormous statue right now?”

“It looks like he's gonna cover it all in gold.”

They were curious about how the idol of Lugh would turn out. That was the way things were; no matter what it was, the expectant mentality would amplify right before something was finished.

As it was Weed, the tourists kept on increasing.

“How much tax did he scrape from Morata to be able to invest in a sculpture like that?”

“As expected, Lords must have a ton of money.”

“I'm telling you, they're all scammers and thieves. How much money do you think he earned as players gathered in the North?”

There was even the appearance of those who saw him as a millionaire and envied him. However, Weed's fame was enormous.

“Do not criticize our Lord!”

“That's right, our Lord is maintaining a really low tax rate.”

“He's the one who emptied his own pockets to make sculptures and raise buildings in the ruin that was once Morata. To such an awesome Lord…”

“You don't even know the reason why he was trying to squeeze out every last Copper when he was selling goods to everyone in the market, right? Sob, sob!”

The female beginners who saw him as kind even showed tears at the criticism directed at Weed as they defended him.

“He's trying to get just one more Copper to invest it in Morata. All for our sakes!”

The players who defended him while calling him a living saint; an excellent Lord who treasured his residents and players!

Weed was so taut with tension that he couldn't even give a shit about the the tourists' dispute.

“I can't spill even a single drop.”

He poured all his attention into the business of gold gilding.

He had a background of papering the walls in his house since he was little. They had lasted a winter by pasting the newspapers left from his delivery onto the walls, layer by layer.

“Papering must be done quickly! It absolutely must not overlap. It'll be tough if there are bumpy raised parts or crooked portions.”

He revived the experience of papering to perform the gilding. Of course, there was a considerable difference between the two. In gilding, gold had to be spread thinly and brushed on, so it had a far greater difficulty.

However, he received assistance from his skills to make up for what he was lacking. He had shitty drawing ability, but thanks to raising his Drawing skill beforehand, there was even a slight effect on his brushing.

At last, the head part was all painted on, and the idol of Lugh's head reflected the sunshine, sparkling golden. He put in blue jewels for the eyes. They were azure eyes gazing far into the distance on a golden head that looked like it would sparkle away at any moment.

The statue of the proud Sun God was being made steadily from the head down.

“Oooh.”

“It's so cool.”

The sight of the statue being completed was broadcasted real-time on the Internet through the tourists. The golden idol of Lugh made by Weed!

It was completed with a majestic appearance and was even holding a huge bow and arrows. For a normal Sculptor, it would have been too daunting to make just the idol, but Weed had a history of making huge sculptures now. He had kept some spare materials on hand, even when making such a large sculpture, and had even sculpted Lu’s equipment.

Ding!

> You have completed the Idol of the Church of Lugh!
>
> Yet another major work brought into the world by the great leader in sculpturing, the pious Sculptor Weed.
>
> One of the Gods on the Versailles Continent, the idol of Lugh, who symbolizes the sun, has been completed.
>
> Covered in pure gold, this work will be regarded as precious by the Church of Lugh.
>
> Artistic value: A work by the master Sculptor Weed. 9,112.

Special options:

* Those who have seen the Idol of Lugh, will have 23 % increased Health and Mana recovery speed for a day when in a bright place.

* The divine power of Lugh Clerics is increased by 12 % for a day.

* Reduces the failure rate of holy magic.

* By the power of their faith, the morale of Lugh Paladins will not falter, and Courage will increased to the maximum value.

* Strength increased by 12.

* Maximum Vitality increased by 20 %.

* Maximum Health increased by 25 %.

* Item drop rate while hunting increased by 7 % for a day.

Effects do not stack with other sculptures.

Number of religious sculptures completed until now: 1

— Sculpting skill proficiency has improved.

— The Advanced Handicraft skill has become level 7. Abilities that utilize hands or tools are further increased by 8 %, and a variety of different areas will be influenced.

— Fame has risen by 499.

— Art stat has increased by 35.

— Strength has increased by 3.

— You have made a religious sculpture. Intimacy with the Church of Lugh has increased, and you will receive their favor. The probability of Lugh Priests visiting Morata has increased.

— For making a religious sculpture, All Stats have increased by an additional 2 points.

He had succeeded in making a religious sculpture!

There was only about 17 % until Weed's Sculpting skill proficiency reached level 7.

“A magnum opus or two should be enough.”

Sculpting growth became slower the more it grew, but the situation was more than enough to make him ambitious. However, since he had sculpted Goddess Freya and the Idol of Lugh, he couldn't make other sculptures of Gods that didn't align well.

“This is enough for a huge stone sculpture.”

An idol of Night, the Thief, or the Barbarian would took a long time to sculpt, and they didn't fit Morata. If he sculpted an idol for Thieves that ended up making the public safety fall and increasing the number of Thieves, it would inevitably be a big problem. An idol of

the Barbarian was also out since their robust physiques scared residents unless it was a place where individuals of the Barbarian race lived.

“It doesn't matter. There's lots of things to sculpt.”

Weed reversed his grip on the sculpting knife. Since many tourists were gathering to look at the Idol of Lugh, it was now time to cook before it got too late.

* * *

“Weed is the Lord of Morata!”

Among the players who enjoyed hunting and adventuring in Morata, a considerable number of the hunting parties had a great interest in Weed. They had come to the North from the Central of the Continent for stronger monsters and quests.

Tourists or beginners, who had just started, did not care much about the Wargod Weed. They knew Weed was a famous person, but they didn't have much interest in him.

However, for warriors, Weed was a subject of respect or a rival they wanted to overcome.

“Let's go see Weed.”

“Do you happen to know where Weed is?”

The news got out early, but they were late to return because they had gone out on an expedition in a hunting ground that was quite far away, even for the North. A fighting party that had just returned from the hunting ground asked around about Weed's whereabouts in the village.

There was a Merchant who knew about Weed.

“Lord Weed?”

“Yes, that Weed.”

“Ah, so you came to sightsee. He is making a sculpture on the rocky mountain over there.”

“A sculpture?”

“Yes, it's an extremely time consuming and tedious process, so try going over there the day after tomorrow if you can.”

At the Merchant's words, the Warrior, Hon, tilted his head. “He's making a sculpture?”

The Paladin, Billeo, replied in a slightly tense voice. “There is talk that his profession is a Sculptor.”

“I heard that the Lord of Morata was a Sculptor too. But him being a Sculptor is ridiculous. At least, the Weed *we* saw didn't have such a personality.”

They had died quite a few times at the hands of Weed in the

Continent of Magic. Of course, their levels in the Continent of Magic had been a little over the medium range, so they could at least keep up when fighting with their guild.

The sight of Weed, who had slaughtered enemies with unparalleled efficiency!

Hon spoke in disbelief. “To say he's a Sculptor… unlike the rumors, maybe he's not Wargod Weed?”

The Warrior, Garrick, stepped forward first. “We'll know when we see him. Isn't it useless for us to be talking here like this?”

A hunting party of 7, including Hon, Billeo, and Garrick, left for the rocky mountain.

It was a party that gathered the players at the peak of even Morata! Even the Cleric's level was over 300, and his robes fluttered as he ran.

They had been in Morata for quite a while, so they knew easily the location of the rocky mountain where the sculptures were. Since the Tower of Light was there, even they always went there when they came to Morata.

“For the Lord of the village that we have been using as a base to be the Wargod Weed, it's really above our imaginations.”

“More than that, for us to have hunted while looking at sculptures he made, should we be thankful or something?”

It was as confusing as being smashed by a blunt weapon from afar.

There were many tourists and beginner players on the road towards the rocky mountain. The beginner players were moving towards the mountain with laughter blossoming on their faces!

“Wow, this is really the best.”

“Man, it was a really, really good idea to start in Morata. It's probably just us who can hunt while looking at sculptures such as these.”

They could fully understand the beginner players' feelings. The village Hon had started in, was a desolate mining town. He had purposefully chosen the sparse mining town in order to grow faster than others. He did go to a big city later, but even there, he had no real memories of seeing artworks. After hearing the rumor that the Pyramid sculpture had been made in the Rosenheim Kingdom, he had even been a little jealous. For beginners who had lots of insufficiencies, how great of a help would it have been to have the awe of the sculptures at their backs?

“The Tower of Light alone is incredible.”

The party, which included Hon, followed behind the procession that was climbing up the rocky mountain. There were many people going up the mountain, and it just happened to be when the sun was

about to set. Since the Tower of Light at night could be called the king of specialties, players in Morata never failed to seek it. Magicians didn't stand in line and used flying magic to soar past and incite envy.

Garrick suggested, “Why don't we also fly instead of going like this?”

“Shall we?”

The Magician Easton cast flying magic and the party members floated into midair. At that, players swarmed over.

“Magician sir, can't you give me a little flying magic too?”

“Please float us up too! Magician sir, we beg you.”

“Magician sir!”

Easton became popular with flying magic alone. His popularity was no less than a famous celebrities'! Seeing that countless players had gathered around Easton from midair, Hon nodded.

“We'll be going first.” They had cleanly given up on Easton. “He'll probably come after us on his own, since he's a Magician.”

The party members went up the mountain in midair with the flying magic.

Besides the Tower of Light, yet another enormous sculpture had been completed on the rocky mountain.

One of the party members, a Cleric of Lugh named Hines, couldn't hold back his deeply touched feelings.

“An idol of Lugh is here…”

The sculpture's effects!

Because of the effect that greatly increased Faith and holy magic, Hines' hunting efficiency in Morata would greatly improve. Clerics of the Church of Freya were already enjoying this benefit. Using blessings or healing magic around the Goddess Statue increased the effect to far greater than normal.

The Goddess Freya Party, the League of Male Priests, the Guild of Abundance. It was enough to make many related guilds and parties form within Morata.

“Lots of Lugh Clerics will be coming to Morata.”

If the number of Clerics and Paladins increased, it wouldn't be long until a formal temple was erected.

“Where is Weed?”

Hon scanned the vicinity of the Tower of Light. On top of being the shadowy night, there were so many visitors or Morata players that it was hard to distinguish anything.

Billeo pointed his finger over in a direction.

“Isn't he over there?”

Oddly enough, only a place where people were standing in line to eat something was lit up with torchlight.

“Let's go see for now.”

Billeo, Hon, and the others flew through the sky and landed there.

A large banner showing food menus was hung up in an eye-catching place.

“Just look at that.”

“Huh?”

> Dragon Soup: 120 Gold
> King Hydra Black Bean Noodles: 100 Gold
> Skeleton Bone Hangover Soup: 13 Gold
> Grilled Dragon (150g for 1 serving): 380 Gold
> Grilled King Hydra (100g for 1 serving): 80 Gold
>
> Place of Origin: River of Lamentations Basin. We handle fresh meat only.

“Whoa!”

Extravagant as prices may be, but the contents of the menu was what threw the party into shock.

“Come, come! It's cheap, cheap! Everyone, you have never eaten meat like this. Dragon meat! This is a spicy soup made with Dragon meat.”

They heard the words of the chef who was advertising.

“But it's too expensive.”

“Still, when will you get to eat meat like this?”

“Yeah, it's killer 'cause it's a frickin' *Dragon* soup. Right?”

Customers were standing in line to receive the cooking. There were no tables so it was a substandard business that ladled soup into bowls brought by the customers.

“Could Weed really be here?”

Hon shook his head to and fro, but unfortunately that speculation was the truth. After Billeo asked some customers waiting in line, he had told them the truth.

“They say that the chef is Weed.”

“Wargod… Weed?”

“I dunno about that, but he's Morata's Lord Weed.”

“Are you sure?”

“There’s a lot of people who knows about Weed.”

The residents of Morata had been employed as labor for making the enormous sculpture called the Goddess of Freya. If you put it in good terms, they had participated in the quest, and, because of that, Weed's face was well known.

“He was supposed to be making a sculpture, so why the food?”

“Apparently a shit ton of tourists gathered while he was completing the Idol of Lugh. Morata residents and players came up here to look at Weed too. Isn't it true that an enormous number of

players have gathered on the rocky mountain?”

Hon nodded. Even in his eyes, a crowd of this extent couldn't be beaten by a metropolis like the capital of a Kingdom. If there was a throng of people like this in the northern part of Morata, then it really was an incredible deal.

“So they said he's cooking from today onwards to 'receive' the people who came.”

“Cooking… who the hell can buy cooking this expensive?”

“Weed tried to sell it cheap, but it seems like players said that he had to charge prices of this extent, at least. Don't be surprised. If you eat 1 kg of Dragon Meat, your Vitality will rise by a whoppin' 20, maximum Health by 120, and Strength by 7.”

Hon's eyes widened in disbelief. “Are you bullshitting me? Is something like that even possible with cooking?”

“Apparently there are a lot of people who've already seen the effects.”

“If it's the meat of a King Hydra or a Dragon, then you can’t call spending this much Gold expensive.”

Hon, Garrick, and the others thought it was reasonable. Rather, it was a chance for them to be able to eat precious food. If it raises their stats, they would be able to benefit from it for a long time afterwards.

“Shall we try standing in line too, for the time being?”

“Yeah. When else will we able to try eating Dragon meat? They said it also raises stats, so if we don't take a chance like this we're gonna regret it forever.”

Hon, Garrick, Billeo, and the others stood in line. The greed for stats was intense no matter what your profession was. Intelligence and Wisdom were the most important for Magicians, but they would never hesitate to take a chance to improve their physical strength or Agility. Everyone was the same regarding their bodily well-being, regardless of profession, gender, or age!

In such a fashion, the customers waiting to eat the food were steadily increasing.

A soup that literally had a Dragon swum in it and left! Black bean noodles with sauce made using the King Hydra's incredible meat and noodles made of flour! There was barely any meat in the Skeleton Bone Hangover Soup, but it still raised stats like Strength, Agility, or Vitality by 1 or 2. It was because the effect possessed by the ultimate cooking ingredients, the Hydra and Imoogi meat, were supplemented by the Cooking skill.

Weed reaped excessive profits as he produced an enormous amount of food. It was such an amount that an army chef would be emotionally touched if they came and saw it.

“As expected, business is hard at first. Once it starts doing well,

it's crazy because of the customers pressing in."

The greatest trouble for a business was taxes! But in Morata, even if he technically paid the taxes, it would all return to Weed's pocket in the end.

Weed employed Morata's residents to help him with the kitchen tasks. A jackpot restaurant that drew in the customers didn't make food, it made money. As long as it was popular, there weren't many enterprises as profitable as the food business. Especially if you could totally rip everyone off like now!

— Cooking skill proficiency has increased.

His Cooking skill had also gone up twice from Intermediate level 6 to 8. He had worked hard to brew liquor at the River of Lamentation to accumulate proficiency. That had already put him at level 7, but because the King Hydra and Imoogi meat were fundamentally good food ingredients and so precious, his Cooking skill proficiency was still surging up.

The Imoogi meat was even causing a panic, hoarding phenomenon. Because the amount of meat was already fixed, there was an uproar of people trying to buy.

"Weed-nim, please give me just 7 servings."

"I'm buying 12 servings."

The meat frozen by Bingryong was being imported via Yellowy! The meat sold like hotcakes as soon as it thawed. The smoke of grilling meat was everywhere on the rocky mountain because of those who were personally grilling their meat by setting bonfires.

"We also sell Imoogi Bone Broth."

The lightning fast sale of bone broth that didn't even give off anymore grease, as it had been steeped a whole twelve times!

Drinks, which couldn't be left out when selling meat, were also prepared.

"Wangisul at 30 Gold, Baeknyunju at 80 Gold. Quantities are limited, so buy them quickly."

[T/N: Wangisul is a spoof of the popular soju Chamisul, and Baeknyunju is a rewritten form of Baekseju, a rice-based fermented wine.]

The flower girl, who had been captured by the Vampire Torido and turned to stone, Prina, was selling alcohol.

Weed was even selling off all the alcohol he had brewed in this occasion. Because he could get a higher price for restaurant sale than individual sale.

* * *

Adventurers arrived at the destroyed Embinyu Fortress.

“Hmm, so this was the ferocious battlefield.”

“It has an eerie feeling, as if something is going to come out.”

Hon, Billeo, Garrick, and the others had moved to the River of Lamentations basin towards the evening. They had emptied their pockets of even their change until their stats stopped rising from eating the Hydra and Imoogi meat.

“I see you are eating a lot. I will specially give you a 20 Silver discount for each plate of meat. Since it is very precious meat, please enjoy.”

When they heard Weed's words, they were, of course, so thankful that they were moved to tears. It's not like they didn't think he was cheap, but he was the one holding the knife!

After eating the food, they went to use the movement portal. However, Morata's Soldiers and Paladins were blocking their way.

“You cannot use the portal.”

Hon asked politely, “What kind of request must we take? Is there a quest, by any chance?”

At their question that was aimed towards getting permission to use the movement portal, the Soldiers shook their heads.

“You must pay a usage fee.”

“A fee?”

“Each person is 350 gold.”

Having used all the money they had to eat meat, Hon and the group fell into an embarrassing situation.

Looking at the group, Hon asked, “What to do?”

“What else? We've gotta get the money.”

The Magician Easton rummaged through his pockets one by one. He had always had the pleasure of making lots of money through the production of magic goods, but thanks to drinking alcohol while eating meat, his pockets were completely empty.

“There's no helping it. Let's take this chance to get rid of things we aren't using.”

“Shall we?”

“Yeah, we might as well organize our packs now.”

In Morata, the group sold off things like swords and armor they had used in the past, and ores they had stored separately. They were scraping up the funds for hunting by selling the items they had treasured in remembrance. It was true that the movement portal fee was a bit expensive, but the sum was more than worth a better hunting ground.

Like that, they moved to the Matallost Church's temple and sought out the Embinyu Fortress.

The collapsed castle walls and tower, piles of skeletons that

looked like they would rise at any moment. It was an eerie night since the riverside was foggy, too, but there were over 80 players who had come through the movement portal like Hon's group. With the excitement of starting a new and dangerous adventure, plenty of adventurers had come to the River of Lamentations, and were looking around the Embinyu Fortress battlefield they had seen in the broadcast.

"Selling goods necessary for hunting. Purchasing all kinds of japtem at high prices."

The Merchant Mapan had come to the Embinyu Fortress entrance and set up shop at some point. Since it was business that only dealt with high leveled players, the margin would be considerable.

"Anyone who'll take a Soldier? I'll fight without sparing myself physically."

"I'm Vittese. Only people who know me, please take me along."

Players who had come alone were seeking parties here. Hon's group didn't need another party member, so they were going to hunt with just their group.

Just then, Weed walked in from the plains. His black mantle fluttered as he walked straight to the Embinyu Fortress. Weed arrived and spoke to those who were looking around inside the ruined fortress.

"Everyone… do you perhaps need a quest?"

"…?"

"I will share the quest I've received. It's a B difficulty request."

It was a difficulty Weed may or may not be able to do. It was underground, so he couldn't drag a bunch of his sculptured life-forms along with him, and there was a labyrinth inside, so it would drain a lot of time.

"What quest is it?" A blond-haired female Elementalist asked in curiosity.

The Wargod Weed. Opinions on him were still divided, but it was the quest of a figure who was believed as a Wargod by many.

"It is the Rescue the Matallost Church's Prisoners quest. It's a part of the linked quest I am doing."

"Really?"

Even if Weed shared the linked quest, the people who joined in the middle wouldn't be able to receive the follow-up quest since they hadn't started from the beginning. If this one quest was finished, it would end with that. But despite that, it was an offer they could not help but be drawn to.

The majority of those who had come here had heard rumors before about the Matallost Church, which was related to the Resurrection Army.

“That's a place related to the Resurrection Army and Daymond, right?”

“Yeah. I think so.”

While Weed was stopping the Embinyu Church's plot, the Resurrection Priests had become unable to raise Demonic Spirits with dead ghosts. It wasn't just a fight against the Embinyu Church, but it had been a chance for Weed to grow even more famous as an adventurer. Because of that, the Resurrection Army was currently unable to increase their forces and were maintaining their siege at Fort Odin.

“Where is the quest location?”

“Right here, it is an underground prison.”

“Really?”

The players at the Embinyu Fortress, including the Elementalists, hurried to approach Weed. They were going to receive the shared quest since it was a very good quest!

“Please share with me, Weed-nim!”

“Thank you. Please share the quest you worked hard to receive.”

Weed smiled as he spoke to those who were thanking him. “However, I will take a fixed participation fee. It's 800 Gold.”

“…”

A B rank difficulty quest related to the Matallost Church! Even if the linked quest didn't continue for them, they could receive the reward of other quests, along with EXP and Fame.

Weed, who was making money off endless rip-offs and scam fees!

Chapter 4: 1 Deeply Touching Copper
◊ ◊ ◊

While the expedition was dealing with the Matallost Church quest, Weed made sculptures. Because the basement of the Embinyu Fortress had turned into an enormous dungeon, it wasn't something that could be resolved in a day.

“There's no end to the world of Sculpting.”

Sculpting had developed and changed over thousands of years. Along with drawing, it could be called the foundation of art.

Weed casually created sculptures of animals such as deer, rabbits, sheep, wolves, and foxes.

“They're guys I've made so much that I'm sick of 'em.”

He vividly remembered the times when he sold them for just a few Coppers as souvenirs in Rosenheim Kingdom. Those were his beginner days, when he dreamt of making a mountain of Coppers and having fun. Back then, he had just taken the main features and had sculpted them cutely with his basic level of Sculpting.

“The simpler and more adorable they were, the better the souvenirs sold.”

It was necessary for them to be light, so the weight wouldn't be burdensome. However, the deer and wolf Weed was making now were different.

“Now I have to try making a real wolf and deer.”

Weed shaped the deer into a form three times its real-life size. What's more, he used precious stone materials such as granite and peridot. He sculpted the deer's simple, innocent bright eyes, round nose, slender body and legs realistically over two days.

Ding!

> You have completed the Spotted Deer Statue.
>
> A work imbued with the passion of a Sculptor.
>
> An ordinary animal was sculpted, but it was made with a Sculptor's skilled techniques and sincerity.
>
> It is somewhat regretful that it does not represent a creative idea or a new challenge. However, it is definitely worthy of being called the most outstanding deer among the countless number of deers in the continent. It is such a realistically portrayed work, that wolves will mistaken it for a real deer from far away and come running.

Artistic Value: A work by the Master Sculptor Weed. 72.

Special Options:

Those who see the Spotted Deer Statue will have Luck increased by 27 % for a day.

Increases the breeding rate of deer in the vicinity by 350 %.

Also increases the breeding rate of wolves by 230 %.

Improves the quality of leather and food ingredients from deer.

The intelligence of deer has been improved and can not be easily hunted by monsters.

Increases the likelihood of the appearance of large deer herds.

Sculpting skill proficiency has improved.

Fame has increased by 6.

Art stat has increased by 2.

The artistic value of the deer figurine wasn't great because he had sculpted it many times before and it was common. Still, the options were what Weed had aimed for.

“There was nothing easier to hunt than deers during those beginner days.”

Deer would stay still even if you got close since they didn't have a fear of people, and it was a beneficial animal that you could even get meat and leather from.

Weed paid a little more attention when he carved the fox and black bear. He portrayed the black bear extremely fiercely thrashing a tree with its front paws, and the fox was a 9-tailed fox.

The fertility of the black bears roaming around Morata has increased.

The foxes have become more clever and numerous.

The monsters for beginner hunting have abundantly increased.

“The leather and meat will come back to better Morata's livelihood.”

With Morata possessing outstanding Tailoring skills, the leather of characteristic animals fetched a high price. That was a very positive development for tight-budgeted beginners!

“Shall I call it a happiness that grows the more it is shared?”

The wealthier the players in Morata became, the more there was

to exploit. Weed set up the animal sculptures with that line of thinking. By making full use of the Sculptor profession, he was bringing about an immense change to the city.

Mooooooo!

The number of cows had increased, all thanks to Yellowy.

Back when Morata was occupied by the Vampires, there weren't even any cows. Far from being able to raise cattle, the food situation was so poor that the Village Elder had to eat by digging up sweet potatoes. Later, the few cows brought by Merchants were raised by players who had chosen professions like Farmer, Shepherd, and Animal Handler. Barns were built, and there was a change in the cows who had grown up eating fresh grass. At night, the cows would mate in the barns. Moreover, if Yellowy went in and out of the barn, the heifers inside would get pregnant 100 % of the time! Sturdy and excellent calves were born.

The cows that had roamed the North formed herds and even pressed into Morata. Yellowy was truly the Emperor of Bulls! The prey also increased because the bison and water buffalos multiplied.

However, the sculpture Weed was going to make with his true care and attention was not the animals.

“I have to make special sculptures.”

A gigantic sculpture made out of bronze, copper, or mixed metals!

With his Intermediate Blacksmithing skills, he could easily extract raw materials by putting japtem or dirt-cheap weapons into a furnace.

Weed sent a whisper.

* Mapan.

* Yes.

* There is something I want you to procure for me.

* What is it, please speak.

* Please purchase an unlimited number of weapons, armor, and metal japtem, worth less than 1 Gold each.

* That's not difficult at all. But is it really okay for me to get as much as possible?

* Yes.

And ah, what about the commission fee?

Mapan brought up the sensitive issue. Though they were on close relations, he couldn't do business for free! However, Mapan was well aware it was not easy to extort money from Weed.

* For the fee, I will give you information you can earn money from.

Good information was sometimes more valuable than gold for a Merchant. There was no doubt about it if it was information given by Weed, who even scammed little kids to extract money.

* Okay. You can count on me.

Mapan used the stores in his possession to purchase metal japtem. Since japtem could be sold comfortably at a decent price, the beginners welcomed it.

“But why is that Merchant buying this many cheap weapons and armor?”

“Apparently it's a request from the Lord of Morata. The Lord of Morata is doing it for the sake of the beginners.”

“As expected. Morata's got low taxes and no territoriality about the hunting grounds. It's really worth calling it heaven, compared to the Central Continent.”

Favorable responses towards to the Lord continued to increase.

Mapan piled up the japtem he gathered like that near the Goddess Freya statue at the artificial lake. The japtem was piled up like a mountain, on such an impressive scale that it was enough to remind one of a junkyard or scrapyard from reality.

Weed mobilized Morata's blacksmiths to produce a huge furnace.

Abusing his power as a Lord!

Although there were bound to be quite a lot of production requests for weapons and armor by players, there were no complaints at the rumour that it was for the construction of a sculpture. It was because they knew how helpful a sculpture was once it was finished. There were even a considerable number of people who made requests to make a sculpture relating to their profession.

However, Weed had already decided what kind of sculpture to create.

“I'm going to need a ton of molten metal.”

He employed the Blacksmiths to extract the raw materials of the various minerals. Among the raw materials Weed pulled out, he decided to use the brass.

With its low price and nice color, it was a widely favored material for beginner weapons! Actually, it was normal to sell brass weapons at a general store or throw them away when you got to level 20. That was because they had poor durability and damage, so they would often break in the middle of a fight.

“But as far as sculpting materials go, it's a blessing.”

Durability wasn't particularly important for a sculpture. A huge sculpture was extremely thick, so there was almost no worry about durability or damage. It was actually better if the color was more beautiful, like brass.

“Dirtman.”

“Hail Weed, the man of absolute charisma! I have come at thy call, Master.”

As its creator, the earth spirit followed Weed with extreme faith!

“There's something I need your help for.”

“Simply command it, anything. Even if this body of mine is broken, I shall follow thee.”

The Dirtman had received thorough mental training.

Weed ordered the Dirtman. “Collect mud.”

“…”

“You have to get a lot.”

The task he summoned the earth spirit for was just to gather mud.

“Yes, Master.”

Dirtman acquired an enormous amount of dirt instantaneously. It was mud that was mixed from finely grained dirt and the lake's clear water. The mud it gathered could even be called a swamp.

Weed went forth with rolled up sleeves.

“Then let's make it.”

“How would you like me to make it?”

“We should build up from the bottom. We must properly lay a foundation.”

Mud was the material he was most confident about. As a child, he would use dirt to make a house or a dam and play whenever it rained. Playing with dirt could be called child's play for him!

'It doesn't even take any money, I could play with it as much as I wanted as long as it rained.'

The boy who silently played in the mud while getting hit by rain in the rainy season grew up and became Weed.

That work experience also proved its worth in the construction site. He had excellent ratio control when mixing cement, sand, and water! He was able to smoothly apply silicone into the bathroom cracks. They were experiences he had earned through playing in the mud.

“Humans develop all their potential when they're young after all.”

Weed revived his experience to create an enormous mold with the mud. Its height was at the level of a 12 story apartment! It was a form that was made by building up the dirt through Dirtman, packing it in with a trowel, and smoothing it out with the sculpting knife.

The problem was that no matter how cheap the brass was, it would take an enormous amount of money to fill up the entire thing.

“Dirtman.”

“Yes, Master!”

“Do you like saunas?”

“What is a sauna?”

“There's something called a clay sauna. And since you're an earth spirit, you won't die from the heat anyway… There's a first for everything, experience is important. Take your friends in there.”

Weed threatened Dirtman, and instructed it to fill up the inside of the enormous mold. Then he poured in the brass material.

Pang, pang, pang!

The enormous brass sculpture that emerged once the mud was broken off! It was a sculpture made through the sacrifice of Dirtman.

It was in the shape of a gigantic and nimble lizard. A Black Imoogi with small, atrophied feet!

Since it wasn't complete yet, he had to make the form more detailed.

“It'll be a breeze to sculpt the head.”

He sculpted the head delicately while looking at the Imoogi head that he had looted.

“Identify!”

> Head of the Black Imoogi, Freykis
> Durability 1,671/3,200.
> The head of an Imoogi. Retains an unknown power. It seems difficult to handle carelessly.
> Options: Can respond to a special production.

In truth, he didn't know what the Imoogi's head was for yet.

“Because a high level monster like this has almost never been caught before.”

It was hard to guarantee victory even when an entire guild went after a level 400 boss class monster. Even if they won, they would incur an enormous loss!

Even the likes of the King Hydra had never been hunted down before, so Weed was the first to have killed a Black Imoogi.

Weed finished sculpting the Imoogi's head, wings, torso, and even the toes with great detail.

An opponent that Weed had personally fought before, he even gave it a vicious and mean appearance. With its wings spread wide open, the Imoogi was twisting up its long neck.

A sculpture that looked down on those below it with its realistic eyes and snout!

Ding!

> — Please set the name of the sculpture you’ve made.

“Hm.”

Weed looked at the sculpture for a moment.

The sculpture felt so alive that it made him perfectly recall the fight with the Black Imoogi.

“Very Strong Imoogi.”

> — Is 'Very Strong Imoogi' correct?

“Yes.”
Ding!

A sublime monster sculpture, the Magnum Opus 'Very Strong Imoogi' has been completed!

A Magnum Opus made by an Eternal Sculptor!
A sculpture created using metal. This is a work that will be an excellent example for Sculptors who learn the Blacksmithing skill in order to make sculptures with broader approaches.
The Black Imoogi, Freykis, that was hunted in the River of Lamentation, was sculpted. A work that perfectly restores the appearance of Freykis in life, the Imoogi that exerted its great wickedness on the Versailles Continent is now left as a sculpture. The sculpture will be a reminder of the Black Imoogi Freykis's might.

Artistic Value: The work of one who is walking the path of genuine works. 10,921.
Special Options:
Those who have seen the Very Strong Imoogi statue will have their Health and Mana regeneration increased by 31 % for a day.
All Stats increased by 15.
Wisdom and Intelligence stats rise by 54.
Spiked increase in the emergence of snake type monsters.
Reduces monster aggression by half.
Reduces the footstep sound of Thieves and Assassins in dungeons by 37 % and heightens the effect of the Stealth skill.
Effects do not stack with other sculptures.

Number of Magnum Opuses completed until now: 6

Sculpting skill proficiency has been improved.
Handicraft skill proficiency has been improved.
Sculptural Understanding skill level has risen by 1.
Fame has increased by 912.
Art stat has increased by 17.
Endurance has increased by 3.
Perseverance has increased by 19.
Wisdom has increased by 7.

For creating a Magnum Opus sculpture, All Stats have increased by an additional 3.

"Check Sculpting skill!"

Advanced Sculpting 6 (99 %): Can sculpt. A beautiful sculpture will also sell for a high price.

You can spread your name on the Continent by making glorious sculptures.

Good for buying a woman's affection.

There was only 1 % proficiency left until the Sculpting skill went up a level.

"A Fine or a Masterpiece sculpture will be enough to raise it."

Even though the Sculpting skill didn't rise quickly, he calculated that one more would be plenty. When his Sculpting skill, which was very difficult to raise, reached level 7, he would only have 3 more to go until he reached Master.

Weed made a sculpture of the King Hydra using cheap, common copper. A magnificently sized Fine King Hydra was made. Made next to the Goddess Freya statue, it felt distinctive.

A pet of the charming Goddess, it was a guardian creature that looked like it would save her from danger. Or it was a vile King Hydra that was threatening the life of the Goddess! The Black Imoogi sculpture was made on her left, and on her right was the 9-headed King Hydra.

Morata's specialties were further increasing as Weed's Sculpting skill level went up.

Advanced Sculpting skill has risen to level 7.

Your sculpting will become surprisingly detailed and delicate.

As your eye for art develops, Wisdom and Intelligence stats increase by 52. Charm has increased by 39.

Sculpting was a skill that had never betrayed him. As he approached Master level, he gained considerable increases every time his skill went up a level. Besides the obvious changes, there were various effects in every field, like his color palette growing more diverse when using Moonlight Sculpting.

"Well, I guess I should just use the remaining metals."

Since they were already melted materials, Weed decided to make huge armors while he was at it. They were armors that could go over the King Hydra and Black Imoogi's torsos.

"I've got to make new attempts for the Blacksmithing skill."

His proficiency wouldn't rise much at all even if he made a simple longsword from the raw materials he'd made from melting the mixed metals. Rather than that, he made armors that huge monsters could use.

“If I need money later, it's convenient to melt it again and sell it.”

This was actually a method frequently used by those among the Blacksmiths who were short on cash. They would make a sword or armor and melt it again. Though it seems like a waste of their effort and hard work, it was a way to get rid of something when they couldn't find a buyer or had made a disappointing product with precious materials.

Enormously Sized Armor
Durability 2,060/2,060.
Defense 269. A work created by a Blacksmith of outstanding talent.
A product made by one with artistic sense. Though it possesses tremendous defense, it's too big and heavy so it doesn't seem like it'll be very useful.
With Silver and Mithril mixed in, it has slight magic resistance.

Restrictions:
1,980 Strength.
Large monsters only.
Torso circumference of at least 170 meters.

Options:
- 210 Agility.
Almost indestructible.
Absolute defense against small weapons.
＋3 % Magic Resistance.

— Blacksmithing skill has increased to Intermediate level 4. The attack and defense of created items will be increased by a set value. Siege weapons will have improved accuracy and range.
— While hammering, Strength has risen by 2.
— For making special armor, Fame has risen by 13.

The Blacksmithing skill had finally become Intermediate level 4.

After the King Hydra's armor, Weed made the Imoogi's armor thin.

“The thickness can't exceed 1 centimeter.”

It was still thick and heavy even then, but it was for conserving the raw materials.

The mountainous pile of materials that Mapan had purchased was almost completely exhausted. The decreasing pile of japtem was enough to make the beginners, Clerics, and Paladins who came every day to watch him make the sculptures in front of the Goddess statue lose their nerve.

“He used all that japtem.”

“A monster, he's really a monster. They say Morata's Lord is the embodiment of hard work; it really is true.”

Beginners starting in Morata became determined as they looked at the Goddess statue and the two giant monster statues overlooking the castle walls. The sculptures that had been made using japtem were becoming examples of hard work for the beginners.

Now Weed had finished all the sculptures he'd planned on making in Morata. It was a refreshing feeling, as if he'd done away with the laundry that was piling up. However, he still hadn't gotten a task completion report from the expedition that had gone into the Embinyu Fortress' underground prison. It was a very complex labyrinth and there were many traps, so there were many casualties.

“Then, I guess I'll resolve the request I put off.”

The request to make sculpture of a daughter for 1 Copper.

He had paid a whopping 4,000 Gold to the Dark Gamer Union to complete an investigation on the Ritten Kingdom's Mandol and his wife for this request.

“Even if the request fee is 1 Copper, I can't cut corners for this.”

Weed planned to sculpt their child with the best materials. The material was the Imoogi and Hydra's leather!

“I won't be able to make armor or a robes with them because of the blemishes anyways.”

He used an intact part of the leather to make an adorable girl's doll.

Blacksmithing skills weren't the only ones he used in Sculpting. He made life-like dolls using Tailoring.

There is no limit to sculpting. The source of sculpting was endless imagination.

“I'll put my pride as a Sculptor on the line and make a Magnum Opus sculpture at the very least.”

Honestly, there was something else he was expecting.

“The 1 Copper request fee. Huehuehuehue!”

Mandol was a bourgeois player who had even been wearing Mithril boots. That meant he was originally from a wealthy family or had an enormously high level.

“It could even be both. Even if you have the money to buy Mithril boots, it's an item that can't be equipped unless your level is sufficient.”

He was also a family guy who loved his wife and family dearly. Although he had only asked for 1 Copper, there was no way that was all he was going to receive!

If you do good deeds and humble actions, good fortune will come.

Weed was greedy for Mandol's Mithril boots.

Chapter 5: Seo-yoon's Home Visit

◊ ◊ ◊

The everyday life of Half Sauce Half Fried.

Clu-clu-cluck.

His comb had grown with dignity and he had the great presence of a Korean chicken. He strolled around the yard catching earthworms as a delicacy.

“Seo-yoon, your meal is here.”

His life of peacefully living without any threats to his life while sharing Seo-yoon's meal was utterly joyful. The joy of sitting between well cultivated bonsai and drowsing off! With his belly full and his back warm, there was nothing more to wish for in his daily life. As Seo-yoon stroked him affectionately, he even rubbed himself against her.

He was living as happily as a chicken can live.

However, Seo-yoon was always sorry for him.

'I'm sorry I can't be here with you.'

That was because Half Sauce Half Fried was alone when she was in the capsule or at school.

Cluck, cluck, cluck, cluck.

Half Sauce Half Fried shook his head back and forth as he walked around in the hospital's yard.

Seo-yoon thought, 'I will bring… a friend for you.'

* * *

Midterms, the festival, and the sports meet had ended, and now there were just a little over 2 weeks until summer vacation.

Lee Hyun grumbled endless complaints. “What kind of university is like this. Can't university be shortened to 3 years, or 2 years, like with military service time?”

Seeing as he had to keep paying the expensive tuition for another three and a half years, his future was dark. A convict's feelings about reducing jail time in a concentration camp or prison would be like this.

“Even if I graduate university, it's not like I get graduation pension, it won't guarantee me employment by a foreign company, and it won't provide me with free lifetime medical insurance either…”

An endless reflection on the impracticalities of university was unfolding.

As he looked at the bars, capsule rooms, and the restaurants on the main street in front of the university, he became worried about the education world and the even the nation's future.

“There should only be farmland or a tidal flat in front of a school. When you're hungry, you can help with the elders' rice planting and get a snack to eat, and in the fall you can help with the harvesting as well. A tidal flat… is always valuable food storage. You can hitch a ride on a boat and go pull up the net, too.”

On a tidal flat, a single shovel would secure food. You could catch things like fresh oyster and octopus and eat them dipped in chili paste. Since you could also catch fish by casting a net utilizing the ebb and flow, it was killing two birds with one stone!

“There would be no need to build a separate cafeteria…”

It could be called a symbol of rural education. College students enjoying fishing while reading, and friendships that blossomed while boiling spicy fish stew. In front of the university, instead of bars, salons, clothing stores, and nail art stores, a fishing discount mart would do.

As usual, Lee Hyun went to the grass plaza during lunch time and ate the lunch lying on his seat. Seo-yoon was sitting next to him, eating lunch together.

Lee Hyun picked up a side dish with chopsticks and put it in his mouth.

'Yep, it's delicious.'

The lunch that had started from kimbap had extended into sushi, and today it was grilled short rib patties.

'It's warm. It hasn't even cooled yet.'

Lee Hyun didn't even know about the lunchbox being installed with heat rays for keeping the food warm. He was just happy that he could try eating ribs without expense.

'So this is the taste of short rib patties.'

In his middle school and high school days, he couldn't use the school cafeteria because he didn't pay the lunch fee. Even so, of course he couldn't go without eating, so he secretly snuck in and took in a lunch tray. He had passed his school days surreptitiously eating the stealth food that didn't go down comfortably.

How envious he was when his classmates were tearing into lunches that their parents had made with their utmost.

“…”

Seo-yoon slightly bit her lips as she was watched Lee Hyun eating happily. It seemed like she would briefly smile. Her smiling face could make a person happy, but the chance to see it was truly rare. Still, Seo-yoon's cold and frozen expression, like when he had made the first Goddess Freya statue, had almost vanished.

Seo-yoon had even brought barley tea; she poured it into a cup and handed it to Lee Hyun.

“Mm, thanks.”

After taking one sip of the barley tea, Lee Hyun spoke begrudgingly, “Don't just eat vegetables; do you want to eat 1 patty too?”

Nothing is given for free. She wickedly calculated to pretend kindness by pouring him barley tea because she wanted to eat the patties too!

'Though it seems she's become a little nicer recently…'

Unaware that the person secretly leaving the lunches was Seo-yoon, Lee Hyun acted like a person given an enormous power.

Seo-yoon shook her head to and fro. She was full just watching him eat.

Lee Hyun asked once again. “Then two patties…?”

“…”

“Should I give you th-three?”

Just how much was she aiming to squeeze out of him with a single cup of barley tea, she was frowning!

There was once a time when he had shared lunch with Seo-yoon and she had eaten *his* kimbap at random.

Memories of that time kept popping into his head.

Lee Hyun sighed. 'I'm not a petty person. I should give sometimes too.'

When he was a kid, he had once gone to his friends holding just a spoon and had gotten a meal. As he recalled that plaintive feeling, he was able to understand Seo-yoon's perspective.

“Just eat comfortably. Since I've never eaten much meat… I mean, because I don't like it that much. Eat as much as you want.”

Lee Hyun picked up one of the patties and put it in on top of Seo-yoon's rice box.

Seo-yoon carefully opened her mouth and ate it.

It was such a lovely sight that it could snatch one's senses away.

After staring at that sight for a moment, Lee Hyun ate the patties too.

Munch munch.

He couldn't give her much of a side dish as tasty as these patties.

“Why is this so delicious? What kind of meat melts in the mouth, it melts.”

The sight of him holding the ribs in both hands and tearing into them after telling her to eat as she wished!

Lee hyun emptied the lunch box cleanly, leaving not even a single grain of rice behind. Of course, he even left behind Seo-yoon's share of one patty at the end. He had finished it off so cleanly that he was

pleased with himself.

'She'll have no complaints if she eats three patties.'

Then, as usual, he pulled out the note that had come with the lunch to read it.

“Will she tell me thanks for eating happily today too? Even if I don't know who it is, she is a truly warmhearted lady.”

But the were words written on the note Lee Hyun pulled out were different from the usual ones.

> I have a request.
> Do you have time today after class?

It was the summons of the veiled mystery angel who made him lunch.

How tastily had he eaten the food she had cooked. His mouth filled with saliva when lunch time rolled around. Thankfully enough, he had even gotten to eat short rib patties today.

Seo-yoon was observing Lee Hyun's reaction with bright eyes.

“I was curious about who it is, this is good.”

With a thankful heart, Lee Hyun wrote his reply.

> My class in the business hall on the 3rd floor, room B07, ends at 4. Please come if you can.

* * *

When class time neared its end, Lee Hyun became a little wary.

“What kind of woman is she really?”

Looking at her cooking skill, she was impressive.

“Her faults are that she uses luxury ingredients too unsparingly and that she only uses a brand-name lunchbox, but I don't think she'll be a bad woman.”

Lee Hyun had already created his mystery angel in his imagination.

“Huhu.”

Including Choi Sang-jun, Park Soon-jo, and Lee Yoo-jung, others had heard of the mystery angel who packed Lee Hyun lunch. Since she would finally appear today, it was a prime chance to resolve their curiosity.

Choi Sang-jun shook his head knowingly. “C'mon, hyung! Can't you tell at a glance? There's no way a girl who brings lunch like that is decent. That's not normal in the world these days. Yoo-jung, aren't I right?”

“To be honest… it *is* strange that she hasn't shown herself until

now even while putting a lunch box in the same place for over a month. Don't expect too much, oppa."

"Hyung, you heard what Yoo-jung said, right? A mystery angel is something that only shows up in fantasy stories. She could even be a spinster professor or someone who came from a social service community."

Even so, the smile on Lee Hyun's lips did not go away.

That she would make a meal for him had great meaning to him.

"A person who put her all into making a meal for someone else… there's no way that she's a bad girl."

Lee Hyun's personal relations weren't all that normal either. Give as much as you receive. Since she had packed him lunch, he had simply come to the obvious conclusion that she was a good kid!

"Then, good work today. Come back with all your assignments finished."

The professor left the classroom and the students organized their bags one by one. However, there were still students gathered in the area around Lee Hyun.

"What kind of person do you think will really come?"

"Just watch it be an old person. It might even be a student from the physical education department."

That referred to the martial arts students from the PE department who bowed to Lee Hyun whenever they saw him.

The students who were about to leave the area around the classroom door stopped stock still in their positions, as if frozen.

"Hot damn! It's senior Seo-Yoon."

"Huh, does she take her next class here?"

University of Korea's official goddess!

Seo-yoon was entering the classroom. Wearing an extremely gorgeous green dress, she was carrying a lunch box in one hand.

"It can't be…"

The face muscles of the students twisted. They knew that the person who had packed Lee Hyun lunch was coming today.

"Was the Goddess-nim's lunch mercilessly going into that hyung's mouth?"

"This tragedy!"

The shocked and distressed male students!

Lee Hyun also felt like he had been greatly fooled. While frequently meeting Seo-yoon here and there, much of his initial awkwardness and wariness had decreased. They had gone through the MT (membership training) and the festival, and he could even say that they had become friends of a sort while eating lunch together. Seo-yoon did often hit him on the back of the head, but now he could even let that slide with a laugh.

However, for Seo-yoon to be the owner of the lunchbox, he was inevitably tense.

'With what kind of secret design did she…'

Lee Hyun was suspicious from the get-go. He was guilty for not putting up his guard and being defenseless while eating lunch.

'That's right! That was no good. It was foolish, no different from being fooled by a loan company that says it'll let you borrow money for ten days with no interest.'

A fierce self-reflection on his careless blunder!

Seo-yoon approached and extended the note.

You'll listen to my request, right?

Lee Hyun trembled like an aspen. 'So she was aiming for this moment! And for over 1 month…'

Pigs are also slaughtered after feeding them well. She had made him eat many lunches planned on making an excessive request by seizing that vulnerability!

However, Lee Hyun did not want to live with a debt. Interest would grow on the debt, and eventually it would be a quagmire he could never escape.

“If it's a suitable request within feasibility… I'll listen to it.”

As if relieved, she pulled out a note she had prepared beforehand.

Half Sauce Half Fried needs a friend.

“Half Sauce Half Fried?” Lee Hyun tilted his head.

Wasn't that distinctive name passed down from the chickens he raised at home?

He soon realized that she was talking about the chicken she had taken at the MT.

“You need a chicken?”

Seo-yoon nodded.

Lee Hyun didn't hide his breath-choking tension and asked again. “A female that can lay eggs?”

Seo-yoon had just wanted to bring him a friend. She hadn't thought of the gender divide in advance. However, since Half Sauce was a male, if it came down to it, bringing a female would be better. Seo-yoon nodded again.

At that, Lee Hyun's eyes trembled. He was forcing himself to resist an incomparably anguished expression.

'A laying female is more expensive… the one we're raising right now in particular is the whelp that ate up half the balloon flower root I picked up in the mountain last time.'

[T/N: Balloon flower root is a common medicinal herb.]

Even so, if he calculated the price of the lunches, a single chicken could be considered fairly inexpensive.

Lee Hyun answered in the affirmative. “Alright. Well… I will bring her tomorrow.”

But Seo-yoon was shaking her head.

I want to bring her after seeing her myself.

At the contents of the note that she had prepared beforehand, Lee Hyun thought for a moment and agreed.

“Fine. You can pick her yourself.”

He was under the illusion that their relationship lacked trust.

'It seems she wants to pick the best chicken since she's packed many lunches. The most nutritious and expensive chicken.'

The chickens had been raised well to an extremely high caliber. The laying females would even fly around flapping their wings soon after laying an egg. Since they all had about the same value as the market price, he had permitted her to come to his house.

* * *

Lee Hyun walked with Seo-yoon all the way to his house.

The men who saw her on the street stood dumbly and rubbed their eyes several times before staring at her again. Both men and women were unable to take their eyes of them. They looked like they couldn't believe their eyes as they stared at the far too beautiful Seo-yoon. Their gazes stolen by Seo-yoon, they couldn't overcome their curiosity and studied the man who was walking by her side.

'Just what kind of lucky person is walking around with a woman like that?'

Lee Hyun was extremely normal, and was wearing a well worn t-shirt and faded blue jeans.

'Why is a bastard like that… did he seize some kind of vulnerability?!'

'He's rich! His family is definitely rich. He's either a wealthy person with thousands of millions of Won at a young age or his inheritance is enormous.'

'The power of love is great.'

Looks of jealousy and envy shot at him, but Lee Hyun stood firm whenever that happened. “Appearance isn't everything in the world. The heart is important.” He knew Seo-yoon's true identity. She was vicious, violent, and even underhanded. The worst, as far as her humanity went!

Even if her face was so pretty that it made breathing difficult, it

was absolutely no good if you fell for her because of that.

“Even if a woman can cook pretty well, has a lot of money, is skinny, has a good figure, and is pretty, wears some pretty good clothing, and is smart, it's not necessarily good.”

If she was bright enough to get into the University of Korea, then she had to be considered brilliant. Even though they took math together, Seo-yoon solved the practice problems in the workbook way too easily. She was even quick to understand and solve parts that the class was going nowhere with.

“In some ways, it's more regrettable for me.” Lee Hyun walked with his head held high.

Seo-yoon was unexpectedly following him well. That she wasn't wearing high heels was part of the reason, but her stride was also quite fast. At the simple thrill of going to Lee Hyun's house, her face was flushed to the point where it was obvious. It was her first time visiting a man's house, and she had happy expectations on what kind of chicken she should bring as a friend.

“We're here.”

Lee Hyun went into a secluded neighborhood opened his own house's door lock by lock. There were a whole 7 locks on the front door! A separate password and even a card key were required.

As Seo-yoon approached the doorway, Lee Hyun blocked the entrance with his body.

“I'll say this in advance, but you can't go into my house and just touch things. I know where everything is, okay?”

Lee Hyun was suspicious and even treated her like a thief! That was primarily because outsiders didn't often come into his house. Choi Ji-hoon had sometimes visited while meeting Lee Hye-yeon, but she didn't bring him that often after the electronics repairs ended.

Lee Hyun was on full guard.

Seo-yoon nodded.

”…”

“Come in for now.”

Seo-yoon walked through the door.

Woof, woof, woof!

A big dog the size of a calf swiftly ran over, lay on his belly, and barked cutely. His adorable bark didn't match his large physique.

The charm of Dogmeat, the name that Lee Hye-yeon had given him himself!

Lee Hyun explained hurriedly, “He's a dog we're raising. He's an extremely dangerous fellow, so it's safer to stay back.”

When Seo-yoon extended a lovely hand, Dogmeat even wagged his tail fiercely.

A dog's sense of smell is 10,000 better than a human's. He smelled

the subdued fragrance of the short rib patties and the smell of the previously departed Half Sauce Half Fried on Seo-yoon and was going to be friendly with her.

Just like when dogs become instinctively wary when they see a dog meat trader, when he saw Seo-yoon, he came running in at the good feeling she gave off and was writhing in welcome. He was prancing around Seo-yoon wagging his tail as he enthusiastically marked his greeting of welcome.

Lee Hyun shouted, “Hey, hey! Stop that, Dogmeat, you're gonna bite someone again, right? Just last week you bit someone and hospitalized them. No. Go away!”

Woof, woof.

Dogmeat just wagged his tail and quietly returned to his doghouse. Even after being falsely accused of having bit someone, Dogmeat was utterly docile.

'A chicken is a few thousand Won at the market, but you can get 200 thousand Won ($~200) for a dog! Not on your life!'

Dogmeat had extraordinarily plump flesh and was exercised, so his muscles were good. They hadn't even sold him when a dog meat dealer came and offered 350 thousand Won (~$350), so there was way too much of a shame to give him to Seo-yoon.

“…”

Seo-yoon approached a wire meshed enclosure with hasty steps. Within the wire mesh, rabbits were hopping around.

Seo-yoon quickly wrote on a note with a pencil.

> Can I touch them? This is my first time being this close to a rabbit.

“Go ahead. Ah yeah, be careful 'cause it hasn't been long since the rabbits gave birth to babies.”

> Babies? Where?

“They're inside the pen.”

Seo-yoon looked at the rabbits in fascination, like a kid eating a hamburger for the first time.

Lee Hyun was OCD about sanitation, so the inside of the mesh was very clean and in good shape. There was a generous heap of grasses for the rabbits to eat, and baby bunnies with bodies about 2 or 3 fingers wide were wriggling in a shaded corner. Even though they were just babies, they had long ears and their hind legs were moving as if to hop around on the ground!

“Aahhhh.”

As if she were singing, an exclamation flowed from Seo-yoon's

lips! It was like a pretty and clear whisper.

She clung to the rabbit hutch, peering in with sparkling eyes. Unable to touch the babies because they might get scared, her expression was one of extreme regret.

“You can touch them.”

“…”

However, Seo-yoon was unable to readily touch them.

“It's okay. They're babies who haven't even opened their eyes yet.”

That wasn't why Seo-yoon was worried, but Lee Hyun put his hand through the mesh and pulled out a baby.

“Here.”

When he lowered it onto the back of Seo-yoon's hand, the baby bunny kicked weakly as it wriggled. Seo-yoon embraced the baby bunny as if it were precious and stroked it. But she soon put it back into the rabbit hutch, because the baby bunny might feel anxious.

Even afterwards, Seo-yoon didn't leave the rabbit hutch and squatted there to no end.

'Surely she won't ask me to give her one!' Lee Hyun became increasingly alarmed. His little sister hadn't returned from school yet. 'Alone at home with a girl… I absolutely must be careful!'

A guy and a girl.

It was a preposterous situation.

Lee Hyun said firmly, “Let's hurry and go see the chickens!” He did his utmost to make his intention to pull her away from the rabbits clear.

Seo-yoon wanted to keep looking at the baby bunnies that hadn't even opened their eyes yet. She had fallen in love with the adorable sight of them curled up with the mommy rabbit. The sight of nonchalant mommy rabbit with its cheeks stuffed with carrots! However, Seo-yoon left behind her great regret in order to let the rabbits rest comfortably and went to the backyard where the chickens were.

Clu-clu-cluck.

Cock-a-doodle-doo!

The Korean chickens were going up trees and flying around like birds. Chicks were toddling about on the ground.

As soon as Lee Hyun and the never before seen Seo-yoon came, they rapidly fled into a corner or above the trees. It was a sight of wholehearted wariness. As they hid in the corners, poked out their heads, and examined the movements of the humans, they didn't intend to come out.

However, through Half Sauce Half Fried, Seo-yoon was familiar with the habits of the chickens. She tore the short rib patty she'd

prepared into small pieces and sprinkled it on the ground.

Clu-clu-clu-clu-cluck!

The chickens leapt out of the trees and from the woods like savage beasts and pecked down the pieces. Even the chicks dove in with their small beaks and were tearing into the ribs.

Seo-yoon patted the chickens and chicks. Despite the fact that she was a stranger, they had quickly became friendly through the patties and stuck to her side like burrs.

'They're taking a liking to me.'

Not knowing what to do, Seo-yoon petted the chickens with joyful eyes.

Lee Hyun was distressed. 'The same short rib patties that was in the lunch I ate…'

A life where he had come to eat the same food as a chicken! Even so, at the sight of the nearly expressionless Seo-yoon really having fun being with the chickens, he followed suit and felt good.

She, a girl who had silently stared without being able to approach, was being touched so deeply while being with the chickens that tears were welling in her eyes.

Even Lee Hyun was getting choked up for nothing. 'This feels even stranger than the first time I fried a chicken for my little sis.'

He knew that Seo-yoon wasn't a very bad person. However, that was not easy for him to acknowledge. 'Whether she's a bad person or a good person… she can't be close to me.'

Realistically speaking, they were living in circumstances that were too different. Lee Hyun could roughly estimate how expensive one of the clothes she wore was well enough. 'Even the brand name clothes that show up on television are over 100 thousand Won ($~100)… with fabric that good, a brand called Dior, and the design, it must be at least 150 thousand Won!'

There was too big a difference in their household situations. A girl like Seo-yoon would like a great guy who Lee Hyun couldn't even compare to. 'A qualified guy will show up.' It was the same with Jung Hyo-rin and other girls.

Lee Hyun made a big decision. “Just pick one. And if there's one you like… you can pick two.”

Having been petting the chickens in bliss, Seo-yoon looked back at him with happy eyes. Eyes that asked if he really meant it!

Lee Hyun gazed far off into the distance as he spoke. “Something like a chicken… two or three are nothing.”

Unusually enough, Lee Hyun was showing great generosity. That was because trying to make up for the lunch price with a single chicken still made him feel indebted.

Seo-yoon chose three chickens.

Every time she picked a chicken, Lee Hyun's face became bloodlessly pale. 'That one's a laying hen… and Boiled Chicken, and even the plump chick that shows promise for a great disposition later!'

A laying hen was of course a valuable creature. He intended on catching it when his little sister married and brought home a husband in the future. But the chickens would keep reproducing until then, and there were two other laying hens left, so it was okay… Even so, the moment Seo-yoon chose the laying hen, he felt a sadness and pain that broke off a piece of his heart.

Lee Hyun spoke mournfully. “I'll… package them for you.”

To make it convenient for Seo-yoon to take them, he tied the chickens' legs and necks with string and connected them to each other. Looking like a chicken sled, it couldn't be any weirder, but Seo-yoon took the string.

She wrote on a note.

> I'm truly grateful. Thank you so much for listening to my request even though it was excessive.

“It's nothing. This much is meh. If necessary, one more…” Lee Hyun hastily revised his words. “Next time you can take one more chick.”

> Really?

“…”

Seo-yoon, who wanted to take one right away when he said she could!

As Lee Hyun conversed via notes, he thought it was a little strange. 'Why doesn't she speak?' He'd originally thought that she was hiding the fact she could speak on purpose to fool with him, but she wasn't. In the MT and the festival, he hadn't heard her speak even once. Even as they ate lunch together, she didn't speak. To be honest, that they conversed through notes after she left a note in the lunch box could be called a tremendous advancement.

'She spoke just one word in Royal Road, but her voice was extremely nice on the ears… it's probably something like her actual voice is really dry, right?'

When Lee Hyun was about to leave the backyard to see Seo-yoon off, Dogmeat approached while whining. Seo-yoon also seemed to think Dogmeat was cute because she wasn't able to move away.

Lee Hyun spoke with a trembling voice. “D-do you happen to like this dog?”

“…?”

“Do you want to… take Dogmeat too?”

Lee Hyun's shocking transformation! He would even give Seo-yoon Dogmeat, who he had cherished and raised for the days of summer.

[T/N: Summer is a popular time for eating dog meat, which is said to energize and revitalize. As a reminder, this is a cultural difference we hope everyone will understand.]

Can I really take him to keep?

"You can. Because it seems like this dog likes you."

More than anything else, Seo-yoon looked delighted beyond measure at the words that it seemed the dog liked her. Surprised and touched, she went as far as to drip tears.

Lee Hyun spoke in a low voice. "This rascal eats a lot, so it's good to feed him often. He'll overturn a food bowl that's too small, so prepare a big one for him, and let him go play in the backyard on rainy days. Don't tie him up at night. He hunts things like mice and weasels. He takes about a 2 hour nap, but if you want to play with him just call his name. He'll wake up. He likes radish and carrots, so give him some now and then…"

Every single word of his explanation was like sending off his lover.

'It feels like my heart is being ripped out.'

Even as he suffered intense agony, Lee Hyun didn't retract his decision.

When giving a gift, you mustn't show a reluctant face. Giving properly was the way to bribe!

'The second and third S-rank difficulty quests… honestly, I think it'll be almost impossible for me to complete them.'

He *was* grinding to raise his Sculpting skill. However, he couldn't guarantee quest success.

'With the alliance with the barbarians, the Power of the Deliverer, and the Sentence of Death, and also a lot of luck, I was able to finish the 1st step of the quest.' He couldn't hope to have always such luck in the quest. 'The 2nd and 3rd steps will be even harder.'

From here onwards, he would be in a desperate and lonely position where he had to go up against the quests with nothing.

'If we could do it together…'

If Seo-yoon participated in the quest with him, it would be much more reassuring for him.

Can I really come play again?

Luxury foreign cars had parked in a line in front of Lee Hyun's house at some point, unbeknownst to him. Seo-yoon's bodyguards had

come and had been on standby. Bodyguards wearing black suits opened a car's back door. The chickens and Dogmeat boarded the back seat. The chickens and dog were enjoying the luxury of boarding a car worth hundreds of millions of Won that even came with escorts and a chauffeur!

Lee Hyun put a false smile on his lips that concealed his bitter inner feelings as he saw her off. “See you. Come play again next time.”

At that, Seo-yoon halted from getting in the car, hesitated for a moment, and wrote something on a note.

Can I really come play again?

“…”

Lee Hyun realized that this was exactly what it meant to be 'lost for words.' Didn't that mean she still wanted more even though he had given her so much!

'Surely she won't come again. It's probably just something she's saying out of politeness, like a common saying.'

Lee Hyun nodded. “If you have time, come whenever you want.”

Thank you. See you next time.

Seo-yoon got into the car and left with her bodyguards. Lee Hyun, who had been standing still in front of the door, blew out a sigh after the cars left.

He recalled the feeling he'd gotten when he met his wicked bosses while doing various jobs after dropping out of high school.

“Those who have the means are really too much.” He had gained a valuable lesson. “Meeting women is really no good.”

The expenses of dating! When you meet a woman, money is spent doing this and that. He hadn't bought Seo-yoon a meal or coffee, and it wasn't like they went to the amusement park together. However, there was the price of the chickens and dog!

“A woman is the enemy of saving money. Enemy.”

Lee Hyun ground his teeth. Animosity towards her was kindling again.

* * *

Seo-yoon's hospital room was reminiscent of an animal farm. Dogmeat was stretched out after eating warm food and meat, and the chickens were freely flying around as they crowed. Even the yellow chick went around the room cheeping.

“…”

Seo-yoon sat on a chair and read books.

“Food Dogs Like”

“A Dog's Lot is the Life of Comfort”

“A Dog Barks for a Reason”

They were guides for raising a pet dog.

Not only did Seo-yoon's hospital room have a private exercise room attached, but it also had 4 rooms, a study, and was even equipped with a home bar where she could drink simple beverages. For Dogmeat and the chickens, it was no different from heaven.

Bark bark!

Dogmeat even barked while looking out the window. Though it wasn't big, he had lived in a house with a backyard, so he needed the fresh air outside.

Seo-yoon prepared to go out. 'The book 'A Dog's Lot is the Life of Comfort,' said you have to walk the dog regularly.'

Seo-yoon put a dog leash around Dogmeat's neck. Dogmeat obediently stayed still as he stuck out his tongue and licked her hand. He was promising his faithfulness to the owner who had dramatically changed his fate as a summer meal!

The nurses looked at Seo-yoon as if it was hard to believe.

“It seems like… she's become much brighter than before.”

“Indeed. It feels like her complexion has really blossomed, huh? She was truly beautiful before, but now she could even make a girl fall for her.”

The nurses hadn't known that Seo-yoon, who had been closing the doors to her heart despite their countless efforts, would suddenly become better like this.

Cha Eun-hee also had to acknowledge Lee Hyun's qualities on that point. “He's a truly kind man.”

The teammates she hunted with in Royal Road didn't spare praises of him.

“His warm heartedness probably thawed Seo-yoon's frozen heart, right?”

She had also heard a lot about Lee Hyun from Jung Il-hun. How many men were there in the world who would be so dedicated to their families! That was why the fact that he spent his life engrossed in Royal Road couldn't be seen as only a fault.

“Seo-yoon forced herself to go to school, but now she's enjoying it. She's really much better.”

That she was raising chickens and a puppy was a very positive sign. Cha Eun-hee guessed that if she was pouring out love while raising pets, the day her heart would completely open up wasn't far. Now Seo-yoon had risen to the level of readily expressing herself with notes. There just needed to be a decisive opportunity that would

spring open the gates of speech.

“Is it finally time to report to the chairman?”

Cha Eun-hee had to contact Seo-yoon's father. He was always receiving reports about his daughter through her bodyguards. If he heard news that Seo-yoon's heart would soon be healed and that she would even be able to speak, he would definitely be happy.

Chapter 6: Sculpture of a Child

◊ ◊ ◊

“Weed-nim is truly a genius!”

Mapan was driving 20 large wagons past the River of Lamentation basin. He was moving the wagons to trade in the Barbarian village.

“Kyaaaao.”

“Fresh human. You are prey.”

Even though a great number of monsters followed the wagons, they were annihilated by Bingryong and Phoenix.

Mapan dragged the carts and safely arrived in the village of the Vejague Tribe. Vejague tribesmen and women of all ages gathered.

“Hurry up and buy! Cheap and reasonably priced goods for sale. Nothing will left if you are late. Buy lots when they're going cheap!”

The goods that Mapan had brought were weapons, armors, leather goods, and foods that had been made in Morata!

A young Vejague Tribe girl grabbed copper earrings that she seemed to like. “How much is this?”

Mapan made a severe expression. “That is very expensive.”

“I know. It seems expensive. I only have leather. Or fangs…”

The fangs and leather of the Black Wild Boar — they were goods that could net a good several hundred Gold in Morata.

Mapan shook his head as if it were preposterous. “But you can obtain those any time if you hunt in this area.”

Mapan, who was showing an example of a wicked Merchant!

The sparsely haired Vejague Tribe lass was on the verge of tears. “Hnng, but I really want to buy it…”

“Then, I will sell it to you for 3 leathers.”

“Thank you, Merchant oppa!”

Mapan traded with the uncivilized barbarians to buy up leathers and material. As the first person to trade with them, he was reaping an enormous profit.

The method of extorting the uncivilized barbarians that he learned from Weed!

The leathers he obtained here were a very precious material. They would be treated as a speciality back in Morata because they were leathers that came from the around the River of Lamentation. In addition, splendid robes and armor would be crafted once they were processed by Morata's excellent techniques.

* * *

Weed sewed in his private room in the Lord's Castle in order to make a sculpture for the 1 Copper request. He bleached Imoogi leather white and made a child's body.

“Though a person's skin isn't white…”

He was stressed starting from making the skin color itself because of its dull color!

It was too much to consider Weed a real tailor, because although his ability to handle leather or cloth was quite outstanding, he had paid almost no attention to dyeing.

“Before, it was fine as long as the utility was good. Because color isn't that necessary!”

Even though the design was an important element for clothing, it sold quickly as long as the defense or a different option was good. Dyeing could also be done by buying the clothing and taking it to another dyer.

Because of that, it was difficult starting from the task of making the child's skin color.

“I don't have to make her too young.”

A newborn. A child not even a hundred days old would just make them recall their sadness more easily.

“Some time must've passed, so let's make her two or three years old.”

It was the age when they would start making trouble.

“Just seeing their face will make you want to give them a rap with your knuckles, and you also regret having the child, only to suffer… even so, it's the time when you love them most.”

Since this was a sculpture he was making for the parents to sort out their feelings and say their final farewell to the child, a cheerful expression would be good.

Not a sculpture that had simply artistic value, but one that could move the heart. It should have a warm feeling rather than detailed expression. He needed a sculpture that could show warmth.

“Even though I don't have that kind of skill…”

Weed had learned by experience that in the end, something he wanted to forget or sadness were all made into memories by time.

To Weed, it was too much to expect a marvelous sculpture that would embrace all their pain and longing. He may be a truly remarkable sculptor, but even though he could express beauty, he couldn't erase sadness.

“What I *can* do is pave the way for them.”

Weed attached eyes made from crafting obsidian onto the doll.

When his sister was little, she had enough toys to not be envious

of others because of the dolls he made in the factory. If she were a little boy, she would have wanted all sorts of toys like planes, boats, cars, and robots, but she had cute tastes since she was a little sister. She was boundlessly happy when she saw a stuffed animal.

“She liked teddy bears to an extraordinary degree.”

Children liked dolls because there was something about them that stimulated their minds.

“Not only a sculpture of child… I'll have to make more dolls.”

Weed thought it was lonely for the child to be alone. He planned on making a Magnum Opus sculpture at the very least, but something would really feel missing with that alone.

They would have to share an eternal farewell parting, so if there was just a doll of a child, the parents' hearts would be torn with sadness.

“A sculpture that'll be rimmed with plenty of children's dolls. Looks like I'll have to make all sorts of things as long as children like them.”

He would make all the things that a little girl would like. He would decorate it prettily with candles and could somehow even make a snowman.

“I can just peel off a bit of Bingryong's skin dust!”

Sculptors were surprisingly capable of doing many different jobs.

Imoogi Leather: Durability 30/30.

An item related to the production skill, Tailoring.

The ultimate Tailoring material, it is an exceedingly valuable item for making clothes or equipment. Imbued with the power of Mana, it grants resistance to poison and amplifies darkness related powers.

Imoogi Leather can not be handled with ordinary Tailoring skills or tools.

Only a Tailor who has risen to the ranks of a Master Craftsman will be granted an incomparably precious experience and the opportunity to create a masterpiece.

Traces of battle are left on the leather, so its value has been slightly compromised. In order to manufacture it into a product, it requires additional repair.

It is a top-grade Tailoring item.

Options: Amplifies darkness related powers. Increases maximum Mana by 20,000. Has poison resistance, so will not be easily poisoned.

Very light material.

He was using an ultimate Tailoring item to make a mere doll. A material that could net tens of thousands of Gold despite their holes and blemishes if it was made into a tunic for an Adventurer or a Magician's robe was cut without hesitation and reborn as a doll.

Ding!

You have created Rabbit Plushie.

A new challenge by a Sculptor, who brings out beauty with his hands!

Rare leather was used as a material to make a rabbit doll.

Weed, the creator of a new revolution in the field of sculpturing, will not stop his challenge.

Artistic Value: A work by the great master Sculptor Weed. 309.

Special Options: Possessing the Rabbit Plushie increases jumping ability by 5 %.

Showing the plushie to children is enough to raise intimacy.

Can increase friendship with the Giant Rabbits.

— Sculpting skill proficiency has been improved.
— Tailoring skill proficiency has been improved.
— Fame has increased by 12.
— Art stat has increased by 3.
— Luck has increased by 1.

The Giant Rabbits hadn't been discovered yet. Like the Yetis that were said to live in the snowy region, they were a tribe that only existed in the legends passed down the generations!

By making a sculpture with a plushie, his Sculpting skill proficiency went up by a whole 0.9 %.

“I didn't think I'd be able to get this much proficiency even by making a Fine piece after my Sculpting skill level rose to 7…”

It seemed like concentrating on large sculptures or stone sculptures was a mistake. Sculpting could only develop by constantly attempting new changes. Themes or works you wanted to make would pile up so much that you'd have to make them without rest — such was the world of Sculpting!

As a human, the sculptures Weed made were determined, to some extent. He tended to make sculptures he was familiar with, and he was gradually straying away from making new attempts. After making Seo-yoon sculptures for a while, he had switched to large sculptures, but there were limits to sculptures made out of habit.

Weed completed about 30 stuffed animals with tender and friendly expressions and laid them out neatly. Wild beast plushies like lions, elephants, bears, cheetahs, and rhinos were in cute poses.

“Though a doll is best made with evil looks and gleaming eyes…”

They were severely mismatched with Weed's tastes, but they were for children anyways.

Out of the dolls he made from leather, 5 Fine pieces emerged. As dolls made by attaching cloth and leather with the involvement of the Tailoring skill, the degree of completeness was considerable.

Weed's craftsmanship boasted tremendous durability. He created plushies that would remain fluffy even if a real elephant were to come and trample them; they would even be perfectly fine if they were burnt with fire magic. They were at a level where children playing with them unawares would be rendered agape with astonishment upon seeing the plushies that remained unscathed even as they burned in a fire!

“The bias that a doll shouldn't be sturdy has to be disposed of!”

As Weed made even more stuffed animals, he learned the basics of doll production. He also displayed imagination that truly went outside of the box. Leather squirrel plushies were turning a millstone to crush a big acorn — they were going to make acorn jelly to eat. Rabbits made carrot soup and were swimming around in it.

“For the piece name, 'Squirrel and Rabbit Cooks' will suit it.”

It was a Fine piece. If he used his Cooking skill later to make real acorn jelly and carrot soup and added it, it would be perfect.

Monkey plushies were peeling bananas, singing, and dancing in a group. They lit a bonfire and cavorted in a dizzying and sensual dance that would seduce monkey lovers. He even staged the comical scene of the playful monkeys falling over and slipping on the banana peels below them.

“The piece name will be 'Cheeky Monkey Festival.'”

This time, it turned out to be a Masterpiece. The sight of the monkeys handling instruments carved out of wood was adorable.

“Next will be…”

Animals, animals, animals.

If it was for a little boy, he would be able to make sculptures like cars, boats, and planes. However, they had to be sculptures for a female child.

“Because little girls like stuffed animals!”

He made so many stuffed animals that it was ridiculous. He had an immunity to hard work, so he didn't tire even after making hundreds of them.

“So I can completely fill up one room with dolls… I have to make it so the child will feel that she was happy and never unfortunate.”

The dolls he was making right now were merely side accessories. He had to make a special doll for his ultimate work, a greater magnum opus than any other works Weed had made. He had to make a true masterpiece.

* * *

Trivan, a village close to Morata, was recorded as a territory that had been ruled by a viscount in the days of the Niflheim Empire. It had been a blessed domain that produced a lot of silk and cinnamon, and had even possessed an expansive granary region.

However, after the harsh winter of the North passed by it, all that was left was a wasteland and ruins. There were also many monsters, so the village was often plundered. After an attack by the likes of wild dogs, there was hardly any food supplies left in the village.

The Styrene Guild settled down here.

“Dig up the ground! We have to take out the rocks and plant the seeds, so we've gotta hurry.”

30 guild members under the command of Styrene were working with pickaxes. It was so they could clear the earth and plant seeds.

“Dammit, at least in Norman Kingdom, even beginners recognized you if you said you were part of Styrene Guild… what the hell is this.”

“There's no helping it since there aren't any residents to do the work. They're all earning in Morata right now.”

Styrene Guild had settled in Trivan Village about 5 months ago in Versailles Continent time! Around the time when the North's pioneering was booming, Styrene Guild had moved their base early.

The villages and territories in the North were currently being governed for the players and guilds that were migrating over extensively.

When the Styrene Guild was choosing a village to settle, their conditions hadn't really been that picky.

“Real estate is all about location. Fertile land? Broad fields? Or terrain next to a mountain? They're all unnecessary. It just has to be close to Morata.”

At that time, Morata had been rising as the North's famous village. Its future looked bright, even to Styrene.

“The benefit of being the center of the northern continent…

Merchant trade is flourishing and players are gathering. In the future, Morata will become the North's hub."

It was as Styrene predicted. Morata developed at a frightening speed from the Lord's bold investment and the influx of people. Every time the Styrene Guild went to Morata Village to purchase goods they needed, they saw a world of differences in the changes.

Where there had only been the Tower of Light and a few sculptures, the ruin that had been Morata Village was paved with roads nice enough that a carriage could speed along on them and new buildings were built. Though it wasn't fancy, a wide central square with a fountain also formed. In the square, Warriors, Magicians, Knights, and Adventurers sought party members to quest and hunt with. As they looked at the Merchants who packed around the fountain doing business, Styrene was so envious that tears sprang to his eyes.

"Our Trivan Village will… definitely also become like this later."

Since the Lord of Morata's profession was Sculptor, there was hope.

"The sculptures will have the effect of drawing in people at first. But once our Styrene Guild publicizes the hunting ground information and stuff, they'll all come to our side."

Styrene Guild excavated a dungeon and publicized monster information. They meant for many players to come hunt and settle in Trivan.

"Wow, so this is Trivan Village? We found it properly."

"Let's hunt!"

Fighting parties visited in swarms. They were able to come quickly on horses because Trivan wasn't that far away from Morata. However, once night fell, they returned to Morata.

"Let's go look at the Tower of Light."

"I'm a bit hungry. Let's go to Morata and eat."

That was the nearby city's limit. The players made money from the dungeon and hunting ground and went to spend it back in Morata.

"Let's sell our japtem in Morata, too."

"Yeah, there are lots of Merchants in Morata so we can get a good price."

They didn't even sell off their japtem in Trivan Village.

Styrene's village operation suffered a loss, but they weren't frustrated and didn't give up. "It's the development of a village, so… we expected this much difficulty at the beginning anyways."

They spent an additional 100 thousand Gold to invest. They built new houses and even made a square so that there were no discomforts. However, players still didn't come, so it was no different from a ghost town.

“It's probably because it's not known. Let's go to Morata in person and try advertising there.”

Styrene went to Morata Village with Duma, a guild member.

“Seeking people to live in Trivan Village. It is a village that the Styrene Guild is peacefully governing. We will support you with various conveniences and even provide you with a fixed resettlement fund.”

They found other guilds that seemed to be in similar circumstances, as they were tearfully advertising.

“We welcome adventurers to come to Home Village. It still has many inadequacies, but our Faroe Guild will…”

“We invite everyone to Keatu Village!”

When Trivan Village had improved a little, Morata had grown in the number of buildings and people. The Goddess Freya Statue was completed, and an artificial lake appeared. The Lord personally expanded the tavern and even set up battle guilds. As it even became a starting city, the Morata region was growing bigger day by day. The expansion speed was so tremendous that the shops and houses were built on the empty lots beyond the Lord's Castle, village, and the stone castle walls. It was a shantytown that overwhelmed them on their first visit to Morata!

“Eurgh, it's really incredible.”

Even then, Styrene was optimistic. The fact that Morata was developing meant that people's interest in the North was also growing! If Morata was getting better, Trivan Village would also gradually grow in residents.

“That's how a city's development is. If one place is intensively developed, the areas around it will also benefit.”

Having learned things like city organization and administration before, Styrene decided to think positively.

Morata wasn't only a village with a Lord's Castle, but also an extremely large land that included the neighboring regions.

“The Lord doesn't even rule the region himself and he entrusted it to the elder, so that lack will probably show up somewhere.”

Through Styrene's personal connections, he was clear to some extent on the situations of other guilds ruling castles and villages. The town's representative didn't leave his position unless there was a serious issue. That was because if you entrusted the administration to the elder or another noble, the expenses on useless aspects were severe. Morata's expenses in the field of cultural art were great enough that they were unimaginable in the central continent.

“Good. Even Morata has a hole to it. If it's investing in cultural art, then the waste will be severe and it'll collapse soon.”

Styrene pulled together the guild's astronomical funds to increase

the number of smithies and develop the related techniques, investing a whopping 780 thousand Gold. He was developing the town tremendously as a city for Blacksmiths. Building a battle guild and even a magic guild, he strove to draw in players.

“There's no place in the North that has a higher technological development level than Trivan Village. In time, this place will also become as big as Morata and grow in people.”

Styrene and his guild mates simply waited for that day to come. They were so excited that they couldn't even sleep properly at night. While they were waiting, as culture developed in Morata, people began to enjoy the town. People tired from hunting, sightseeing, adventure, and quests comfortably enjoyed songs, sculptures, drawings, and art.

Culture didn't even take much money. There were keepers making bunnies act cutely, performers, and even players who displayed their japtem and boasted. Morata's players were happy.

Ding!

— 35 residents from Trivan Village are moving to Morata.

The complaints of the residents are intense.

The residents came complaining to Styrene.

“Why is our village failing to thrive like Morata, my Lord?”

“There's nothing for the village children to play with.”

“Even after finishing hard work, I have no enthusiasm for life. I think this town is too desolate.”

The residents were deeply dissatisfied over the lack in culture. Morata's residents were continuously growing, but Trivan Village's population of just 3,000 was continuously falling. The loyalty of the town soldiers also fell, and work efficiency didn't rise, either. As the residents decreased in number, silk production fell and the fields they had cleared with difficulty remained empty; they couldn't even collect resources from the mine. Following the decline in residents, there were even cases where quests naturally disappeared. Players would come after struggling to finish a quest, but the store owner who was supposed to give them the reward had gone and disappeared. Plunged into a shocking situation, the players asked the residents but the reply was really the last straw.

“The weapon shop mister? He moved to Morata the other day. It won't be easy to set up a new shop there, but they say it's a village that people really want to live in. Me? I'm going to Morata soon, too. If you want to fulfil the work that was entrusted to you, go to Morata.”

Ding!

— 23 Trivan Village residents are moving to Morata.
The residents want a religious establishment.

“I want to see Goddess Freya. Thankfully there's a goddess statue in the village next door, so we will spend the rest of our lives there.”

“How happy must our Morata friends be as they receive the blessing of faith? Going to Morata will bring one closer to the goddess!”

The residents continued to leave. Wanderers visiting the North had been settled in Trivan Village by giving them money and food, but they moved away. As a result, the village's population was just barely 3,000 and didn't grow.

Until now, Lords had worried over economy, technology, and military power. They viewed culture with scorn and paid no attention to it. If many Bards visited, they were even treated poorly for being noisy and annoying. What use was a rise in culture! Investing the maintenance fees or construction costs of culture-related facilities in other places was considered far more profitable.

There was no change in that way of thinking in other places in the continent, but Styrene was currently feeling an acute lack of culture. To make matters worse, he even received news of the issue he had worried most about.

“Guild master, they say Morata's Lord Weed has returned.”

At the guild member's report, Styrene's head began to throb painfully.

“You're saying he returned without going off somewhere and dying?”

“Yes. Apparently he's making a Statue of Lugh now.”

“Ugh … making another sculpture!”

Styrene shook his head. No matter how he thought of it, there was nothing as reckless as competing with a Sculptor in city development. But even if he were given a fortune, there was no other alternative. There were just no Sculptors as outstanding as Weed in the Versailles Continent; the whole area was impacted every time he made a sculpture. As a neighboring Lord, it was like hell for Styrene.

“But there's also a recent piece of news.”

“What news?”

“The Lord of Morata's true identity is Wargod Weed.”

“What?!”

Wargod Weed!

It was such a feared name that it sent shivers down their spines.

Styrene was also a player who had grown up in the Continent of Magic. He had personally experienced the Continent of Magic Weed's wicked charisma. He killed, stole, and was absolutely ruthless. Like

looking at a mountain that could not be climbed, Wargod Weed had filled him with despair.

“Are you saying he's really Wargod Weed?”

“We can't be certain, but they say that possibility is sufficient.”

“Did he say it himself?”

“Apparently so.”

“…”

“Several news channels on broadcast are saying there's an almost 100 % possibility that Wargod Weed is Morata's Lord.”

Styrene was silent for a while.

Wargod Weed's nature was extremely brutal, and he didn't condone those who challenged him. He was a figure who would be furious even after razing everything to the ground by the simple fact that there was a territory in Morata's vicinity.

Styrene had fled the rough wolves in the central continent, but he ended up next to a tiger's den.

He was about to recall nightmares from the Continent of Magic. However, his guild member said something that was somewhat comforting.

“A rumor isn't always true. And there are also many opposing opinions.”

“What are they?”

“First of all, he does have quite a few connections to Wargod Weed, like the evidence of the Ice Dragon and his relationship with the Freya Church. However, it's not certain whether it's actually him or not.”

“Then…”

“Even if he's really Wargod Weed, there's not much he can do. Could he dare to challenge our guild alone?”

They were the welcome words Styrene had been waiting for.

“Right. There's nothing to fear even if he's Wargod Weed. And if his profession is really Sculptor, then we could even see it as a blessing and a stroke of luck, right?”

“There's a chance for us.”

Styrene harbored grand ambitions concerning Morata. He would develop Trivan Village, draft soldiers, and seize Morata by force with his guild members! Styrene Guild had over 600 high-level players settled in the North altogether. If they acquired mercenaries from the central continent, they could field an army of about 2,000.

They were planning to take everything Morata had.

“Even if it's Weed… this time, it won't go as he pleases. His record from the Continent of Magic will end here. And if he isn't Wargod Weed, then it'll really be over for him.”

“That's right, guild master!”

“Then hurry and go to Morata to lure in some residents so we can enact the plan.”

“…”

* * *

Weed developed his Tailoring and Sculpting skills as he immersed himself in making dolls.

“Dolls can also be called a field of expertise, after all.”

He could earn a lot of proficiency or Fame if a work he made for the first time exceeded a certain level. However, he accumulated professional experience after making several of them, so the effect on his skill level or proficiency grew as well.

It was like how it was awkward for a Swordsman to use magic, and how Blacksmiths couldn't make tons of different kinds of weapons. Of course, a Sculptor was the profession at the very peak of hybrid characters that could combine all of those.

“A doll of a child…”

Weed tasted failure dozens of times. He couldn't make a perfect magnum opus, a work that looked like it was carved from the light of the heavens. He could only dream of it because he knew his own humble skills well. However, it wouldn't do if there was an aspect that he found lacking.

“A young little girl. A doll of a lovable, bright, and peaceful child.”

Weed tore at his hair. The King Hydra and Imoogi leather that had been stacked like a mountain was shrinking. If bronze or iron had been used as materials, then he could melt them down again and reuse them, but for the most part, he couldn't recycle the leather materials and had to discard them.

“It's hard enough making a child that's flawlessly bright, but darkness follows brightness.”

In the eyes of the parents who couldn't have the child, such brightness would be pain that would chip away at their hearts. Even so, their sadness would be infinitely greater if he made a child that was shrieking as it cried.

“Magnum opus. I need to create a magnum opus…”

Weed fell into confusion. His worries on what kind of work he should to make were growing even more severe.

“Should I guess how Seo-yoon looked when she was young and make that?”

Escaping from reality!

He thought it'd be easy to sculpt Hwaryeong or Irene in their

youths. However, Weed soon saw the error of his ways and shook his head.

“The player named Mandol believed in me and entrusted this to me. I can't just do a rough job.”

It seemed like doing the quest would be way easier than agonizing over something that was so difficult to resolve.

The proficiency he accumulated while making dolls also amounted to 36 % of level 7. Even if his skill level and expressiveness grew with experience, it was no good if he couldn't decide on the right subject.

“I'm not being too greedy… I just want to sculpt the best little girl that I can.”

Weed's worries kept deepening.

Since there was no word from the expedition that had gotten the shared quest and had left for the Embinyu underground prison, he just kept sewing dolls. As he repeatedly experienced countless failures, he was trying to make that *something*.

Dolls, dolls, dolls, dolls!

“Gaaaaah!” Lee Hyun kicked away his blanket and stood. It was such a big issue that he couldn't sleep. “I thought I'd never have to suffer because of a doll again.”

The dolls of young girls wouldn't leave his mind.

“Should I just make it as a bronze statue? If I make it using gold or silver, then…”

He came up with ways to escape, but he didn't want to run away from it like that. Such an action would be completely betraying the trust he had gathered in sculptures thus far.

“I can't just forget about it without even being able to make the requested sculpture.”

It wasn't his way to give up because it was hard. No matter what, he just had to find the method!

Lee Hyun went to the market to cool his head. The dawn market was overflowing with liveliness from the people buying and selling things like vegetables and meat. But even within that liveliness, he couldn't think of the right sculpture for the young little girl.

“Should I try going to the maternity ward or a preschool?”

He could see little kids there, but it wasn't like he didn't know what a child looked like.

“They're sleepy little devils that get hungry and you have to frequently change their diapers.”

No matter what kind of little girl doll he made, he wasn't pleased.

On his way home, Lee Hyun passed a photo studio. Photographs for the first birthday celebrations of little kids and wedded couples were on display.

As he looked at those photos for a long time, Lee Hyun gained enlightenment.

“For a sculptor, the subject can be felt and seen in the finished work alone. That's probably very different from a parent's perspective.”

There was a life to a child even in an ordinary photo, and to a parent, that one photo would be a truly precious work.

Lee Hyun tried thinking of saying farewell to a little girl from a parent's shoes.

Just what was he supposed to do about a parent's breaking heart as they parted with a doll of a newborn baby!

“Making a doll of a child was wrong from the very beginning!” Lee Hyun suddenly shouted.

If he thought about it from a parent's perspective, then he already had the most definite answer.

Chapter 7: A Girl's Life

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Weed brought out the King Hydra and Imoogi leathers. Even after making stuffed animals and failed dolls of children, there was still quite a lot left. The very best of the leather was left, too.

For works of art, the first one made wasn't always the best, and the last one didn't necessarily have a high degree of finishing. However, a sculpture that didn't move the emotions wouldn't be able to impart any emotions to the opposite party.

He had saved the best materials in case he came up with a sculpture that he really had to make!

“I should be able to make 40 dolls. It's a shame, but this should be more than enough.”

Weed cut the leather and started from making a sculpture of a newborn baby. It was a little girl who had just been born. Her skin was wrinkled, and she looked like she was about to cry, as if she had truly come into the world for the first time. She was small enough to be held in one hand.

“A living being within a few hours of being born. This is a baby that has made her first contact with the world after coming out of her mother's womb.”

Having already received information about Mandol and his wife, Weed took a little of their features when making the doll. Even so, however, there wasn't a particular characteristic to the newborn babe.

“Alright. The first one is done.”

Weed laid down the baby doll and raised the leather again. He needed to make the second doll now.

As he made the doll, Weed's hands were very careful. “It's a newborn baby. In her first year, she'll start toddling, and changing her diapers will be awful then, too. From a parent's perspective, it'll be a time when they can't help but be worried all the time.”

Imagining the future of the little girl that Mandol's wife would have given birth to, Weed made the doll very tensely.

“She needs clothes, too.”

He had covered the newborn baby doll with clean cloth, but now he used Tailoring to clothe her in baby clothes.

He completed the doll of a little girl gurgling into a laugh at her first birthday party!

“Now she knows her mom and dad… it's the time when she's growing up like that.”

The doll he made next had grown a little more. She was taller,

and her fingers and toes had grown longer. She also had hair in cute pigtails.

“The age when she'll learn how to speak and start acting mischievous.”

He clothed the fourth doll he made in a kindergarten uniform. It was a doll of a young student wearing adorable clothes and even a backpack.

The fifth doll had grown up quickly; it was time for her to go to elementary school.

She had just been a baby-faced and cute kid until now, but from the sixth, she began to have a slightly feminine charm.

“The neighborhood boys will really want to flip up her skirt, and she'll have grown into a girl with a pretty smile.”

The little girl who made mischief and ran around like the queen of the neighborhood would grow up charmingly. Her eyes would be as playful as before, but brighter, and she would be taller.

Every doll he completed after that was taller and had longer hair. The hairstyles also changed several times, ranging from long straight hair men preferred to a lively pixie cut.

“This is also pretty hard work.”

He had to go buy hair from the sculpting material shop and sew them all in; even so, he didn't tire because his efforts were making something.

From the fourteenth doll, she had already graduated high school and had become an adult.

She had grown into a woman who seemed very energetic and talkative. As if she was going to suddenly bring her boyfriend over to introduce him to her parents, she had rosy cheeks and charming expressions. He even made pretty accessories like a hairband and necklace with through crafting. She only needed a book bag and a uniform in her high school years, but she was now a college girl. He had to make her a bag and heels, which were like the lifeblood of a woman.

“But luxury is still a no!”

He compromised with reasonably priced rabbit leather for the goods she carried around. Even so, she still gave off the feeling of a refined college girl. They were accessories that suited her expression, clothes, overall feel, and perfume. Like how a parent treasured their child, they were crafted with his utmost; the female student was as lovable as a real person.

It took an extremely long time to make the sculpture, but Weed was concentrating so much with every ounce of his effort that he didn't realize it.

From the seventeenth doll, as if no one could capture the passage

of time, the small newborn baby that had to be cared for had found a job.

The eighteenth doll even went into volunteer work to help people in difficult situations.

In the nineteenth, she brought home a boyfriend, and in the twenty-first, she finally got married. He even made a reliable and thoughtful husband with her; they were a couple that matched each other like lovebirds. He made the wedding guests with materials like deer or rabbit leather, and they celebrated the couple's future.

The twenty-third doll even had a child, and she lived in a happy home. She did the dishes with her husband, the laundry and cleaning, and went to work as she lived happily.

Every time a doll was completed, the woman would age, and the passage of time became apparent as wrinkles appeared in her lovely visage.

Dolls that raised children and lived with her husband.

“It's too fast; they say that a person's life goes past as quickly as a growing sprout and can't be turned back, but even so, it's too regretful.”

Past the young and immature days that had sparkled like jewels, the time that the doll experienced accelerated. From the thirty-sixth one onwards, the doll spent more time alone; her children had grown up, found jobs, and married. She became a grandmother and took naps, read books, and made yarn scarves for her grandson and granddaughter.

The Imoogi and Hydra leather that had been so abundant began to run out.

The forty-first doll happily and quietly closed her eyes. She was in a place with her family.

After making all the dolls, Weed sat still in deep despondency. The leather had completely run dry, and there was nothing more that he could do.

— Please set a name for the sculpture you've made.

The message window popped up when Weed stood still without moving his sculpting knife.

The sculpture that covered the lifetime of a doll was finished.

Weed weakly shook his head. “I will not set a name.”

He didn't want to attach any name to the sculpture right now.

— If a name is not specified, then the name of the Sculptor might not be known and it may also be left as an unfinished work. Is that alright?

“It doesn't matter. This was a work that I was not qualified to make.”

Ding!

Unnamed Mythical Sculpture

A gift thrown into the world by a Sculptor possessing talent and effort at the level of amazing a God!

The entire process of a human's life, from birth to death, has been expressed in a sculpture.

The Sculptor's perfect skills can even be felt in the meticulous needlework — absolutely perfect needlework, without even a single loose stitch or missing hair.

It is not known what Sculptor was able to make such a magical work of art.

Artistic Value: A blessing to sculpting. It will become an opportunity to develop the continent's sculpting a step higher. 24,610.

Special Options:

Those who have seen the Unnamed Mythical Sculpture will have their Health and Mana regeneration speed increased by 32 % for a day.

Increases maximum Health and Mana by 30 % for a day.

Strengthens the effects of blessing magic for a day. Increases All Stats by 20.

Increases Agility and Courage by an additional 7 %.

Increases movement speed by 30 %. Can shorten the time taken because the farther one goes, the faster movement speed becomes.

Increases birth rate of the city or region where the statue is located by 100 %. Reduces the violent tendencies of residents. It will be a very big help to security, but the natural increase of warriors and soldiers will decrease.

Permanently increases Health by 500.

Permanently increases the Wisdom and Intelligence of the Human race by a maximum of 15.

Effects do not stack with other sculptures.

An unfinished Mythical work.

— Sculpting skill proficiency has greatly improved.

— Handicraft skill proficiency has greatly improved.

— Sculpture Comprehension skill level has increased by 1.

— Because the artist who made the work was set to be unknown, Fame has increased by 2.

— Art stat has risen by 89.

— Perseverance has risen by 41.

— Charm has risen by 26.

— Wisdom has risen by 10. In return for creating an unfinished mythical sculpture, All Stats rise by an additional 5 points.

A blessing to sculpting. For making a work about birth and death, stats related to combat will increase by 8 % for one week. Maximum Mana and recovery rate will be increased by 65 %.

The reward was enough to make Weed's mind go blank. It seemed that he would have to completely throw away the prejudice that a Sculptor wasn't as good as a Swordsman or another profession now.

“Check Sculpting skill!”

Advanced Sculpting 7 (65 %): Can sculpt. A beautiful sculpture will also sell for a high price.

You can spread your name on the continent by making glorious sculptures.

Good for buying a woman's affection.

At the level of being able to lead the Versailles Continent's artistic community. It is regretful that there is no successor who can match the skills of this unique Sculptor.

His Sculpting skill proficiency had increased by a whopping 29 %.

Thanks to putting in his utmost, Weed had ended up making a work that even he couldn't understand.

“I just made dolls…”

Weed came to a deep realization. There was a reason why children and women liked dolls.

It was their instinct to find goods with value!

He had made the dolls for a request barely worth 1 Copper, but there was still a fault. The number of completed dolls was considerable. He had made them inside the roomy space he was using as a workroom in the Lord's Castle, but he had to move them to another place so that Mandol and his wife could look at it comfortably. He could use an empty room in Morata Castle, but he didn't want to do so.

“There has to be a separate space for the child.”

Weed mumbled quietly. “Whisper, turn off chatting restriction.”
Ding!

— Whisper restrictions have been released.
— Guild chat restrictions have been released.

He opened up the whisper and chat functions that he had shut off while returning to Morata. With the restrictions turned on, he didn't see or hear the guild chat, and when someone whispered him, he could only hear them if he gave permission. It was a measure that he'd set up because there were so many people looking for Weed.

Sabrina: Hurry and hit it!
Edwin: It hasn't been hit quite enough.
Pin: It's resisting a lot, how annoying.
Edwin: But I think we've almost got it.

It seemed the Travelers of the Wilderness Guild was in a special hunting ground.

Weed ignored most of the guild's talk, because although the chatting restriction had been turned off, there were still as many lurkers as ever.

— Mister Pavo.

He sent a whisper to the Architect Pavo, who he'd met in the Northern Expedition. It had been a really long time, but he never forgot players that he could use.

'He was of a considerable level as an Architect.'

Pavo was the Architect who had been busy making even the stairs that were good for viewing for the Goddess Freya Statue in Morata.

— Weed! Is it you?

Pavo hadn't forgotten Weed either. Since he was the Lord of Morata, of course he couldn't forget.

— Where are you?
— I'm in Morata. I heard the rumor that you returned and are making a statue. I couldn't go see you because I was setting up a store in the square.
— Are you almost done with your work?
— I just need to put up a door for them. If I hurry, I think can finish in an hour.
— What about Mister Gaston?
— He's working with me. Right now he's painting a

ceiling fresco; he's finishing it.

— That's good. I have a request to make; I would like you to build me a house.

— The Lord of Morata needs a house?

Pavo looked like he didn't understand it very well. There was no reason for Weed, who had the Lord's Castle, to need a house. For things like item storage or resting in a bedroom, he could just use the Lord's Castle, after all.

— Actually… I need a space to leave a sculpture.

— Really? Then can it be a house with a large warehouse attached?

— Rather than a warehouse, I'd like you to build a house that isn't shabby so it can be displayed in a room.

— That's not hard, where are the sculptures?

— They're at the Lord's Castle. I will instruct the guards to allow you to enter the place where the sculptures are.

— Got it. I'll go there tonight at around evening. We'll decide on the request fee after I see the work.

— Thank you.

Around the time when Weed finished his conversation with Pavo, he received a whisper from a player named Hon.

— This is Hon of the underground prison expedition. The dungeon exploration is almost complete.

— Have you found the prisoners of the Matallost Church?

— Yes. We've found one for now, and the other prisoners are said to be in the vicinity.

— You've worked hard. I will also go there soon.

It was time for Weed to go to the underground prison for the quest.

* * *

The River of Lamentation basin that was connected to Morata by the movement portal! The second S-rank difficulty quest and the Rescue the Prisoners of the Matallost Church would take place there. When Weed returned to the River of Lamentation again with Yellowy, he could see people gathered in groups nearby.

“That person is Weed…”

“He's the person called the God of War?”

“Shh! Talk quietly. He might hear, so be careful!”

They were people who had heard the news that Weed had stopped making sculptures and was leaving for the River of Lamentation from their friends in Morata and had been waiting in advance to look at him.

A considerable number of high leveled players in the North paid the toll fee and were hunting near the River of Lamentation. Considering its distance from Morata and the level of the monsters, it could be said that there was no better hunting ground. There were occasional cases where a party bravely ventured deep into the North, but instances where the entire party was annihilated from a slight mistake were numerous. Since help could be found from the surroundings at any time, the River of Lamentation was a fine hunting ground.

Weed looked around at the players with cold and frosty eyes. 'There are lots of people.'

In Morata, he had been a simple Lord who had sold food and japtem, but he couldn't be that way in the hunting ground, too. There were already quite a few figures who were staring at Weed with challenging eyes. If these high leveled players came at him all at once, then even Weed wouldn't be able to avoid death. He was even more sensitive because he had ultimate Unique items like the Necromancer's Magic Tome, Talrock's Armor, Ancient Shield, and Kolderim's Daemon Sword.

'This isn't Morata.'

In Morata, people couldn't even dream of challenging Weed because of the Soldiers or Knights. If someone raised a sword at the Lord, then they would either be subjugated by the Soldiers or the Freya Church's Knights would thoroughly destroy them. However, anything could happen in a hunting ground. He could meet murderers and even drop an item.

In order to not be looked down on, Weed feigned nonchalance as he looked at the people.

“Pieces of trash everywhere.”

“…”

The crowd was silent.

The Wargod Weed they had imagined— it was an arrogance befitting of the strongest player in the Continent of Magic.

“Did they wait here without hunting to look at me? Though there are monsters everywhere… tsk tsk.”

Weed tsked as he insulted them outright. Even people who had purchased food or sculptures from Weed in Morata couldn't conceal their shock at his completely different attitude.

The thoughts that occurred to them then!

'This might be the true Weed…'

'Is he acting politely to beginners or individuals alone? We're gathered in a group and he's actually criticising us… he might be a wolf in sheep's clothing.'

There were over 200 high leveled players gathered here, yet he disdained them all outright. A player's pride originally went sky high once they passed level 300. Their personal connections built from various places and the force they showed while hunting would become the object of envy. The number of players was immense because the Versailles Continent was expansive, but the higher you went up the ranks, the less players there were. A level 300 was at a level where they wouldn't be disdained anywhere. At that position, they could join a prestigious guild and speak out some in a smaller to medium guild. The pride and ego of high level players was as high as a mountain, but there was no one here who would dare to interfere with Weed. They might attack him if they were alone, but it wasn't a mood they could go forth in because the other people were staying put. Weed had dominated the atmosphere with a few composed words.

“How pathetic.”

“…”

The people couldn't even say a single word in reply. At some point, it had become natural for Weed to speak like this. He was friendly in Morata, but he revealed his extremely arrogant nature before the gathered high level players. It was the might of the absolute strongest, something they had dreamed of since who knows when.

However, a few people harbored resentment towards the continuing disdain. Having become stronger while wandering the hunting grounds, their competitive spirit flared at Weed, who was acting like an almighty maverick. It would be an honor even if they died, and they felt like wanting to challenge him.

A subtle change in mood was flowing in the repressed crowd.

Just then, Weed burst out with Lion's Roar, “Bingryong! Phoenix! Why haven't you come to greet me even though I've come!”

A sound spread like lightning!

At Weed's call, Bingryong and Phoenix spread their wings wide and flew over from far away. With a size that rivaled a Dragon with his torso alone, Bingryong was fearsome enough to give people who were seeing him for the first time get goosebumps. Bingryong and Phoenix let loose a round of cries into the sky before coming down to sit on the rocky mountain.

ROOAAAR!

SCREEECH!

Cracks formed on the mountain's stone and sand was falling.

“Master, I came at your call.”

“Master, I have come.”

Bingryong was good-looking — he had heft like a Dragon, refined eyes, and a deft snout! With an air of indifference characteristic of a bird, Phoenix was cold, yet explosive power that seemed like it would burn everything lay dormant within. That Bingryong and Phoenix courteously lowered their heads to Weed.

“Ooh.”

“Incredible.”

The crowd felt some kind of wall separating them from Weed, who had tamed and was pushing around those two seemingly wild divine beasts. The constantly complaining, timid and fearful Bingryong and Phoenix, who was so very stupid that it caused accidents! Unaware of their relationship with Weed, who enslaved them with frustration and bullying, the people could only see it as amazing. There would be no one who could challenge Weed even after seeing Bingryong and Phoenix bowing their heads to him.

“You idiots. I get angry just seeing you guys.” Weed furrowed his brow.

Bingryong and Phoenix looked like they were accepting it without any resistance.

'What kind of dirty tantrum is he going to throw now…'

'Let's just ignore it. There's probably something we did wrong.'

Weed said, “Incompetent and useless bastards.”

Bingryong and Phoenix rolled their eyes in pointless guilt and sorriness as they looked around. Every time Weed insulted them, there was some kind of decisive reason. If they talked back and snapped at him, this frustration and insulting would go on for much longer, so they didn't ask for the reason or argue. They decided to do the same this time, too, and just waited.

Weed shook his head towards Bingryong and Phoenix as if it was annoying. “I don't even want to see you pieces of crap, so fuck off!”

Thinking it was their liberation, Bingryong and Phoenix unfurled their wings and flew away. They had to get far away from him before Weed changed his mind. They fled so quickly that the rocky mountain shook and harsh winds blew.

The crowd's spirits sank even further. They were giving him looks of envy and respect rather than competitive or fighting spirit. With this much disdain towards Bingryong and Phoenix, whose matches were hard found even in the Versailles Continent, they were thinking that the disdain directed at them was somewhat natural.

Weed strode towards the direction of the Embinyu Fortress. The

Rescue the Prisoners of the Matallost Church — monsters were gathered in hordes along with an enormous labyrinth in the underground the Embinyu Fortress.

'Two people are better than one for clearing a dungeon like this.'

Because of concerns regarding poisoning or curse magic, it was beneficial to have one or two teammates.

* * *

Holding a shovel, Pavo walked to the black castle with Gaston.

“Have you come to fulfil the Lord's request?” asked the guard watching over the Lord's Caste with a spear.

Pavo came to the Lord's Castle quite often because of his Architect license and had accumulated intimacy, so the guard had recognized him.

“Yes, I have.”

“The Lord has asked you to build a house to store a work. I will guide you to the place where the sculptures are located.”

“Thank you.”

Pavo and Gaston followed the guard into the Lord's Castle. It was the Lord's private space, where people normally couldn't enter. Not even a single simple decoration was hung on the walls, and they couldn't even look at things like the valuables.

“There's nothing special,” said Gaston with disappointment.

As a Painter, his Art stat or insight would rise if he appreciated impressive artwork. It was due to their natural ambition that art professions wanted to appreciate many works.

“This is the room.”

The guard opened one of the Lord's closed chambers.

At that moment!

A brilliant light poured out from within the room.

> You have discovered a Mythical sculpture.
>
> Birth and death!
>
> For the first time, you have discovered a work whose craftsmanship will be envied by Dwarves and kings will want to acquire even by going to war.
>
> The Sculptor who made the work did not reveal his name.

— For a discovery that will cause a sensation in the world, Fame has increased by 1,290.

— You have acquired the title of Mythical Sculpture Discoverer. If you tell the story of discovering the sculpture in a tavern, you will be able to drink and eat unlimited food and alcohol for free. Nobles and royals who love beauty will welcome your visit, and they will want to hear your story in detail.

As soon as the door was opened, the Fame that was so hard to raise went up by over 1,000.

That was before Pavo and Gaston were able to come to their senses.

You have seen Unnamed Mythical Sculpture.

The flower of artistry, this work is worth being called a marvelous work of art.

An unknown Sculptor made the sculpture with birth and death as the theme to demonstrate his skills. Those who see his sculpture and understand will celebrate life with him.

Health, Mana, and Stamina regeneration have increased by 32 %.

Maximum Health and Mana have increased by 30 %.

All Stats increased by 20.

Agility and Courage have been further increased.

Movement speed has quickened by 30 %.

The effect will be even greater when moving long distances. Having enjoyed the joy of being alive, Health has permanently increased by 500.

It is difficult to understand this work due to low Wisdom. Wisdom and Intelligence have permanently increased by 2.

You need to look carefully and frequently in order to understand this work.

Architects were a profession that required surprisingly high Wisdom. That was because they needed to know how to use simple magic in order to construct a building. However, even his Wisdom and Intelligence were insufficient to understand this work.

That was it for Pavo, but Gaston was as shocked as if he'd been hit by a lightning bolt.

— For appreciating a Mythical sculpture, Art stat has risen by 47.

A massive increase in the Art stat!

In the case of magicians, an apprentice who learned from a teacher could grow much faster. However, artists could only prove themselves with their works alone!

The dolls displayed in the light looked so realistic that it was unbelievable that they were leather dolls. The clothes they were wearing, especially the buttons, were made precisely; not a single thing was out of place.

“To think that these sculptures are Weed's true skills…”

The Sculptor who made the dolls was unknown, but who else could have made them but the Lord of Morata, Weed? They were sure of it because Weed had asked them to build a house for works that were in the Lord's Castle.

Pavo sent a whisper to Weed with a trembling voice.

— A-are you are busy right now?

Weed's answer returned quickly.

— It's okay. Please speak.
— There's one thing I'm curious about.
— What is it?
— Why didn't you publicize your name after making this sculpture? Though we were able to get discoverer's fame thanks to that…

It was something that Pavo and Gaston really couldn't understand, despite being grateful for it. If he had made a sculpture like this, of course he should boast and let it be known.

If Gaston had painted a Mythical work, he would have gone around running his mouth everywhere.

— Because I was ashamed.
— Ashamed of what?!
— I was too embarrassed to reveal my name because my skill was too lacking and faulty…
— *Choke*

He was too embarrassed to attach his name after making a Mythical sculpture like this!

Weed's modesty was enough to make them choke.

Chapter 8: Encounter with Da'in

◊ ◊ ◊

Pavo had great ambitions as an Architect. He was now skillful at constructing houses and buildings for business.

There was quite the variety of preferences for houses in Morata. In other affluent kingdoms, you had to be a high leveled player or have a lot of money in order to own your own house. That's because they had to build a villa or some luxury residence in order to not be inferior to others. But in Morata, there was a representative style of house.

The shack!

It could be built easily, and it cost almost no construction and maintenance fees. The shoddy shack could only block the rain and wind, but there were so many of them that there was no reason to feel ashamed all alone.

Since even beginners could build one if they acquired lumber, they would prepare a house at just level 20 or 30. They could easily realize the precious dream of having their own house. After preparing a house, the beginners would leave equipment or goods they weren't using inside their houses and even call their friends to throw parties. Morata was their hometown and they even had a house; that was the main reason why beginners couldn't leave Morata even after growing.

Normally, permission to construct shacks wasn't often given because public safety and health would drop severely if many of them were built. The price of land was also high in other cities, so building a house took tons of money. But Morata's land was on the cheap side, and public safety and health were quite good as well. The Lord had made an expensive waterway and established a vigilance corps, and relief for the poor went on smoothly due to the Freya Church's influence, so there were hardly any thieves.

“No village idealizes the shack more than this one does.”

Pavo had built a considerable number of shacks. The shacks he built were popular because they were sturdy and the inside space was also well designed. A shack that had just been built had a charm of its own. It would deteriorate after a long time, rotting or breaking and leaking, but it was more or less worth living in a shack that was like new.

Adventurers, Merchants, and wealthy players who crossed over from the Central Continent wanted high-class residences.

“Please build me a house on a place that looks down on Morata. You have to make the warehouse big, and please use expensive

materials, too.”

There was also a lot of demand for high-class houses or business buildings, so Pavo worked hard. The thousands of shacks, hundreds of luxury villas, Morata's bridge, and business buildings that he had personally built became landmarks.

“The Designing and Construction skill haven't been growing well these days.”

The proficiency from shacks was paltry. The Fame he acquired and his proficiency growth from completing a business building or villa were also decreasing.

“I'll have to make a really awesome work.”

Pavo's affection towards Morata was extremely high. Since he had built many buildings that were being used by Merchants and residents, as an Architect, he was as fond of it as if it were his own city.

“Let's try making a proper building.”

With perfect timing, Weed's request set the fire of challenge blazing in him, as an Architect. He needed to make a work of construction for the sculpture about birth and death, as well as the countless dolls.

“Intermediate Designing!”

Ding!

— Designing is underway.

The blueprint popped up as a translucent 3D image in front of Pavo.

By using Mana, he could try setting up walls, columns, and even decorate the interior, as if he were actually making a house. The beginner Designing skill had a limit to the overall size, and you couldn't use diverse materials either.

The Construction and Designing skill were inseparable. The materials and new styles that were applied in Construction were able to instantly influence the Designing skill and develop it. Things like the arrangement of furniture and the structure of the house were completed through Designing. After making a blueprint, you could even give instructions to laborers.

Pavo's Designing skill was Intermediate level 3. It wasn't at the level of being able to construct a castle, but he could certainly make a fairly large building and garden.

“They're the skills that made 3 deluxe villas at once.”

Pavo made the blueprint with an enormous structure.

Weed said he had made the dolls for some child.

“That noble aim… I can't disappoint it.”

Weed had permitted a budget of 1,980 Gold! It was just enough

money to barely make one house. However, Pavo planned to invest in materials unsparingly for the construction.

“Let's bring in good trees and flowers from the continent to decorate the garden. We'll make the garden about one and a half acres, and the area of the building has to be at least 8 acres.”

Envisioning the ultimate landmark building, it had a size and design that he had never made before. He intended to make use of his fortune as an Architect, the profession that was said to have the most money after a Merchant, to try making a building that was worthy of emblemizing Morata.

“As an artist, it's ridiculous that Weed didn't have a single space worthy enough to display his sculptures.”

He would make it so that Weed's sculptures could be put on display, allowing the residents and adventurers to see them.

Pavo began construction. He dove right into production because the work was so tremendous.

* * *

Pale was in the middle of hunting with his party in a dungeon when a whisper came from Weed.

— I have to hunt in an underground prison. It might be a little dangerous, but please send me one person or so.

The Embinyu Fortress underground prison was very complex. There were parties hunting and countless monsters everywhere. Since there was apparently a monster that used poison as well, it was tough to fight recklessly.

— I understand.

After ending the whisper, Pale spoke to his party. “Weed asked that we send one person.”

“Shall I go?” Hwaryeong stepped forward at once, as if she'd been waiting for it. There was no way she would miss an opportunity to be with Weed for the first time in a while.

“Of course Weed would welcome you, Hwaryeong, but he says he needs someone who can cure poison. Irene, do you want to go too?”

“What'll you do here if I go?”

“We'll figure it out somehow. It's fine since we have Da'in, too.”

Pale's party fulfilled very many requests from Morata. They were hunting and doing quests side-by-side while getting the book possessing the 'Secret of Manufacturing Ancient Breastplate.' Even

though the quest they were currently doing had a difficulty of C, it was dangerous dungeon hunting where they were attacked by monsters with very high damage.

“Won't it be dangerous for the people left behind if both Hwaryeong and I go?”

“Maybe. It depends on how long Zephyr can hold on, but it'll definitely be a bit dangerous, huh?”

As a party that lacked a Warrior or Knight, it was true that they were uneasy whenever they did a dungeon exploration. Even though Zephyr took charge of defense, it was tough when there were a lot of monsters rushing in. Hwaryeong harassed the monsters with her Confusion Dance or Seduction Dance, so if both she and Irene were gone at the same time, it would greatly impede the exploration.

“I will go.” Holding a cudgel, Da'in stepped forward.

Shaman was the profession that could be called the jack of all trades! She had striking power, but it was also her specialty to soundly beat up the monsters when they went crazy.

As she swung her cudgel, Da'in occasionally murmured to herself. “Flogging has to be done by hand after all. There's no fun in hunting without the taste of giving a beating.”

The most popular Shaman in Morata, she had been helping out in Pale's party.

Zephyr nodded. “Miss Da'in can be relied on since she can detoxify and even cure. Looks like Hwaryeong and Da'in can go together and help him.”

After they decided on the people who would go to the underground prison, Yurin drew a picture based on Weed's explanation. In the picture, Yurin, Da'in, and Hwaryeong were standing next to Weed at the entrance of a dark prison. The advantage of Picture Teleportation was that multiple people could be moved at once. Granted, the teleportation of an absurd number of people was impossible since everyone had to be drawn on one sheet. They also couldn't teleport too deep underground due to the Mana limitation.

“Picture Teleportation!”

Yurin, Hwaryeong, and Da'in disappeared, as if they were sucked into the drawing. Then, as if swaying into being, they suddenly appeared in the place where Weed was waiting, the entrance to the underground prison.

MOOOOO!

Yellowy greeted them with a gentle face, as if glad to see them. He was a male, and as the special characteristic of an art creature, he liked beautiful people.

“Ohh, what a handsome and dashing bull.”

Hwaryeong gently stroked Yellow's neck. It was a happy moment

for Yellowy, who went slack-jawed with a naive expression.

“Oppa, how much does this fella weigh?”

“He's a top of the line Korean cow. I added a little more to the special parts, like ribeye.”

“He looks tasty. Oughta be pretty good if you slow-cooked him and ate the bone broth mixed with rice.”

Yurin, who was joking because she was in front of Weed! Yellowy's complexion lost all color.

In the meantime, Weed and Da'in saw each other.

Da'in's face had become hard to recognize due to the aftermath of the curse she had received in Morata. She could get rid of the curse, but she had left it in order to see how Weed was getting along.

Da'in bowed lightly at the waist first as she greeted him. “Hello. I heard much about you.”

She greeted him while hiding her complex feelings from meeting him after a long time.

Weed introduced himself briefly. “I'm Sculptor Weed. So you're the Shaman introduced by Pale.”

“I'm Da'in.”

A spark flashed through Weed's eyes. Ever since he heard that there was a Shaman named Da'in in Pale's party, he'd thought it was a strange coincidence.

“Da'in… and you say you're a Shaman.”

“Why?”

Weed shook his head as if to clear something from his mind. “It's nothing. It's just that I recalled an old memory for a bit.”

“What kind of memory was it?”

“It's just… a memory I keep to myself. Now is not the time to share a long story.” Weed spoke coldly because he had remembered the bittersweet memory from Lavias.

Lots of people were gathering in order to sightsee after hearing the news that he had arrived at the entrance to the underground prison. There were also people who had followed him from the Matallost Church's temple. It would be better to take the mercenary Smith and get to the objective quickly.

“Let's go into the underground prison first and chat later.”

Weed pulled out his sword and advanced. He had used Sword Grind and Armor Polish in advance, so there was nothing holding him back.

Da'in swung her cudgel as she chanted a spell. Weed was encased in the effects of a spell that amplified Strength, increased Agility, movement speed, and attack speed, and even hardened his skin. The effect was to the extent that it was unbelievable that she was a normal Shaman. Weed's Strength increased by over 230, and his movement

speed also became very fast. His whole body overflowed with strength, like he had dropped off heavy luggage. With his Stamina and Agility increased, he felt like he could run like the wind and leap from cliff to cliff. He felt as if he could run like a cheetah!

'She's an incredible Shaman,' Weed thought to himself.

One of the finest Shamans in Morata, the proficiency of her skills was far from average.

* * *

“What a tremendous underground dungeon. I didn't think it'd be this deep.”

The Warrior Hon looked around himself. The Embinyu's underground prison boasted a massive size, as well as a complex labyrinth and various test subjects. The level of the monsters was also on the high side, and the traps were numerous too. The Thief players in the party tried to disable all the traps, but it still took them over twenty-five days of struggling on the path to the place where the priests of the Matallost Church were tied up.

There were over 40 players who had received the 'Rescue the Prisoners of the Matallost Church' quest together, and their levels were fairly high as well. They were only able to comb this vast dungeon all the way to this point because they had the help of players like the Explorer and Elementalist.

The Paladin Billeo said, “Because it's an underground prison underneath the Embinyu Fortress… it truly wasn't a normal dungeon. About when do you think Weed will come?”

The Magician Easton lit a bonfire idly as he replied. “We heard he left Morata, so won't it take him about five days or so?”

Gallic looked unconvinced. “That fast?” He meant that was too quick compared to how much they themselves had suffered.

“We told him the path. Since we also got rid of all the traps, he should easily be able to get here in four or five days. Though it might take longer, y'know.”

Hon made a decision as the party's leader. “Then since we can't waste our time either, let's hunt in the area while we wait.”

“Shall we?”

“Look around you. The others are all hunting too.”

There was a considerable number of monsters in the underground prison. Because it was a place where light didn't shine in, it was inhabited by hideous demons or creatures that had been cursed by the Embinyu. They were also at a pretty high level. For the most part, level 350 monsters emerged.

“He should be able to get here within five days if he hurries.”

* * *

Weed closed in on the Dark Knights guarding the entrance to the underground prison. Since he was appreciating the effects from making a legendary sculpture and also had the Shaman's skill on him, he moved as fast as if he were flying.

“The enemy we have to face is fifteen Dark Knights.”

They were the gatekeepers of the Embinyu Church. An excommunicated priest of the Demeter Church was also helping the Dark Knights, but they absolutely had to be taken down in order to enter the underground prison. It had only been a short amount of time, but it was common for people to fight the gatekeepers when a certain number of parties hunting in the River of Lamentation basin gathered. They needed at least 20 people in order to fight the Dark Knights at ease!

Weed was going to fight them with Hwaryeong, Da'in, and Yurin.

'It'll just be cumbersome if there are too many people.'

There were a lot of times when he also hunted alone, so he thought this many teammates was more than enough. If there were more people, he even had to distribute the japtem; the agony he would feel then would be indescribable!

“What, is he going to go hunt with just *those* people? Is he crazy?”

“You saw in the broadcast. He's super strong.”

“He succeeded in the quest because there were a lot of barbarians who helped him.”

“He'll only be able to go into the underground prison if we fight with him…”

“Let's just wait and see for now. He'll probably ask us to help if he needs it.”

The God of War Weed. Without concealing their excitement at being able to become his teammate, the watchers looked on from afar.

Of course, they would leap up right away to help him if he called and would be able to show off their strength. That was because being in the same party as Weed was a tremendous honor.

Hwaryeong spoke as if worried, “Around what level are the knights?”

“In the early 330s. The Elite Dark Knights are about 380.” There weren't any Elite Dark Knights here, but Weed explained for now. “If the knights have firm wills, the Seduction Dance probably won't work well on them.”

Hwaryeong's Charm was enough to make Yellow wag his tail.

Besides the Charm skill that was vital for her as a Dancer, with the combination of her clothes and accessories, there was no man who wouldn't fall over if she flirted with her flashy and evocative dance.

“It's just that my Health is low. I'll die pretty quick if I take a hit from a monster at the level of a Dark Knight; do you think it'll be okay?”

“I'll draw their aggro first, so please dance after that.”

“I'll only believe in you, Weed.”

The Dark Knights recognized Weed and reacted.

“Our church's enemy!”

“He's the conspirator who destroyed our religion's headquarters and caused the High Priest's death.”

“The vicious guy who lured in the uncivilized barbarians with his cunning tongue and challenged us, the followers of a sacred purpose, has come.”

The Dark Knights charged with fierce rage.

The charge of knights!

There were many cases where knights insisted on single combat. Because they had honor and pride, knights did offer to fight one to one. However, such a regulation didn't didn't apply to Weed. He had become an enemy who could not coexist with the Embinyu Church.

Clink clink clink.

Rushing in with the sound of their armor joints clattering, the charge of the Dark Knights was tremendous. A charge of the knights had been enough to deal a wound even on the former King Hydra's thick body. Because they carried the weight of their great armor, Vitality and Health would fall even if the charge was blocked with a shield. Cases where you were paralyzed from the impact were also numerous.

But Weed had a defense skill as well.

Close Eyes Tightly!

It was a Warrior technique that raised Perseverance and Toughness through the restriction of vision.

That wasn't all; he hardly used it, but the Moonlight Sculpting Blade was a skill that integrated attack and defense. When he used it as an attack skill alone, he could ignore the enemy's defense and deal a lot of damage. It was thanks to the characteristic of a Sculptor, who carved into actual materials, and the technique that was capable of handling light. It was also possible to use light to blind the enemy's eyes or to surround himself completely in light to use it for defensive purposes. There were the disadvantages that it couldn't block a physical blow as well as a magic attack and consumed Mana quickly, but the results Weed had gotten from experimenting with it had been fearsome.

His entire body covered in light and his wings spread out, he had penetrated the clump of monsters. A precise swordsmanship directed at the monsters that were approaching at rollercoaster-like speeds! He could have also shot out light and hit them, but the Mana consumption was too severe if he did that. Even when he tore them apart by swinging his sword himself, it only took a moment to reduce the monsters to ashes. 7 Caltrops! A battle against them would have taken a while if he fought normally, but they had been annihilated boringly in just 30–40 seconds with the Moonlight Sculpting Blade. Granted, he had to rest for a long time after ending the battle since he used up almost all his Vitality and Mana.

He could also use the Wings of Light that had been granted life to bypass monsters or assault them from behind. The fighting methods he could use were endless.

However, there was almost no occasion where he had to fight to the best of his ability. The biggest fighting opportunity had been when he was seizing the Embinyu Fortress, but the summoned Balkan, King Hydra, and Imoogi had fought better than he had expected. He tried to reveal his true skills for a bit when cutting the King Hydra's necks all at once, but he was so tired that it had ended all too blandly.

“I'm fed up with hunting, it's boring.”

Following his own growth, Weed was at the point where he was bored of most battles. He couldn't raise Perseverance or Toughness in a fight where he had to do his best. For the ultimate hunting efficiency, there were things he needed to sacrifice out of necessity.

The underground prison was said to have monsters everywhere. Since he expected that the fighting would go on continuously, he couldn't rely on a skill that consumed Mana.

“Dirtman, turn the ground around me into mud.”

The earth spirit was summoned in the blink of an eye. It was fresh since Weed had made it himself, took little Mana besides the summoning, and it was an obedient spirit. In his current state of very accelerated Mana recovery, he could use as many spirits as he wanted.

“I came because I received the command of Weed-nim, the most handsome man in the Versailles Continent. I will make the earth into mud right away.”

Other spirits were arrogant and wasted a lot of time in responding to a summoning. Even with high intimacy with the Elementalist, it was rare for them to be obedient. However, Dirtman popped out as soon as it was called.

The ground the knights were charging on soon transformed into a mire that came up to the ankles. The armor wearing knights scattered and struggled on the place that had become bog-like.

“What's that spirit?”

“Is it an earth spirit? It appeared so quickly!”

That was the surprised reaction of the people who saw Dirtman.

“Hooray for Weed-nim, the being of absolute charisma! I have completed thy command. Do you have any more work for me? Please call me for anything.”

Weed spoke as if being generous. “You may fight with us too.”

“Thank you, Master. I shall not forget this kindness. I will treasure it deep inside my earth.”

Dirtman raised a mound of dirt and attacked the Dark Knights. There wasn't much damage to speak of since it was dirt, but rocks were cleverly hidden inside so the Dark Knights had no choice but to fight it. Dirtman also didn't use much Mana, considering it was a spirit. Since Weed currently had overflowing Mana, there was no need to be stingy.

“Dirtman, you may use as much of my Mana as you want.”

“I am honored, Master.”

BOOOOM!

Lines of dirt flew into the sky like arrows.

Weed ran into the bog that where the Dark Knights were in mud up to their thighs and being harassed. The ground before his feet became firm, so there was no discomfort to walking.

“The foe of the Embinyu Church!”

“It's good you came; I shall rip you apart.”

Even while being very preoccupied due to the mire, the Dark Knights swung their swords at Weed.

They were big knights, but their heights were about the same as Weed's because their legs were sunken in the mud.

The Dark Knights madly swung their dirtied swords. The sword Weed swung rang out with a beautiful sound as it flowed on the swords of the Dark Knights in succession.

Claaaaassh!

As if a blizzard was being split, a path was cut through the flock of Dark Knights.

“Bone Cutter!”

“Sharpness Blade!”

“Illusion Sword!”

The swords of the Dark Knights shined as spells were cast. A damage amplifying skill that cut through the opponent's bones! A skill that penetrated by concentrating strength into sharpness! The Dark Knights even used a skill that divided a sword, turning it into five.

The Dark Knights surrounded Weed and unleashed their attacks. Weed turned violently. He avoided the Bone Cutter that would deal a fatal wound if he took a direct blow to his bare body, and he twisted to the side to avoid the sword that came straight his way. After

narrowly dodging them, the sword that was divided into five attacked him.

Weed's eyes flashed. 'There's always a weak point to skills like this.'

The decisive disadvantage that strength and damage would be dispersed!

“Sword Dance.”

Weed agiley moved his feet as he swung his sword to parry all five of the attacks.

“Arghh!”

It seemed the Dark Knights felt great shame that their attacks had failed. That was because even though they had put away their high pride to try a combined attack, they hadn't been able to kill Weed.

“Bone Cutter!”

“Keep attacking!”

Among the Dark Knights, Weed sped about like a bog eel. After leaping into their midst, he used his enemies so they couldn't use their skills and moved in a range that was close enough for their skin to touch.

'Close combat can be called the ultimate fight.'

Swordsmen used their skills from the very beginning. They unleashed their swordsmanship without hesitation, and even used long-ranged attack skills like lunges. With flashy effects, they displayed as much might. The Swordsman was a profession that had more awesome damage the more high leveled they became. There was a reason why they took the center stage in hunting.

On the other hand, Weed believed in the single Sculpting Blade and made do with his body for most of his fighting. With the least Mana consumption, he had grown through close combat, which could improve his skills and Toughness. Though the knights were quick and sharp, he was experienced and could avoid them fairly well.

'And… they're much slower than the sahyungs or master's sword.'

One could roughly predict where an attack would land just by looking at the foot movements. Weed stored the placement of the Dark Knights and their attack directions in his head and moved amongst them.

'If you're fast and smooth, you won't fall apart even when fighting greater numbers.'

His sword flowed and burrowed in while parrying.

The Sword Mastery skill that had risen to Intermediate 7 became Weed's foundation in battle. As his Sword Mastery skill was higher than the Dark Knights', there were many cases where his opponent's attack skills were nulled when he beat them at a precise strike point.

“Triple!”

Weed used only the bare minimum of skills as he sliced past the Dark Knights as if sweeping through. He hid his Sculpting Blade, which could be called his patented move, in order to avoid the attention of the onlookers. That was because not showing a considerable portion of his skills would be helpful in a nasty situation. Sculpting Blade was effective when facing a monster that was much stronger than a normal one and it was particularly optimal for tearing apart Knights or Warriors.

“Ack!”

“He got through.”

The Dark Knights groaned heavily, but they didn't fall. That was because they had immense defense and Health from wearing full plate armor, the reason why knights were so tricky to face. However, the damage didn't end with small wounds, due to Weed's sword, the Daemon Sword that was said to have cleaved the devil.

— Daemon Sword's Freezing Curse.

A part of the body has frozen, so Strength and Agility will fall greatly.

Will reduce Health by 35 every second due to the damage of the ice attribute.

— Daemon Sword Cracked Rock Curse.

A crack has formed in the equipped armor, causing the durability to fall continuously.

Decreases defense.

— Daemon Sword's Nightmare Curse.

Evil spirits will rush in to cause optical illusions; after willpower has been weakened, they will rapidly disintegrate the body.

The Dark Knights fell into chaos from Weed's intrusion. Hwaryeong used the instantaneously created opening to push into the knights.

“Seduction Dance!”

The sensual bubi bubi, which could only be seen in a club or a night stage!

*[T/N: For those who may have forgotten, this is a dance that involves grinding and generally sexy movements, leading to the name, bubi bubi, which translates literally to "rub rub" — it is **not** derived from "booby booby".]*

When Hwaryeong's body grazed past, the Dark Knights froze in their tracks. They drooled with hazy eyes and even lost their minds. Hwaryeong had grown enormously in the time while they had been apart, so as she danced, a butterfly flew around and flowers were strewn about.

"A dancer must always be graceful!"

She was even using the Flower Scattering skill!

As Hwaryeong danced, she left an inviting fragrance in her wake. Over 10 Dark Knights were charmed and lost their will to fight for an instant.

"Arrrghhh!"

Weed easily hunted down the Priest with weak defense first. Killing Priests didn't take long since their Health was low even if they were high leveled. By the time he got rid of the Priest, the Dark Knights attacking Weed had decreased by three thanks to Hwaryeong's work.

"Too easy."

Weed and Hwaryeong were perfectly in sync.

Weed slipped past the attacks of three Dark Knights with ease as he unfurled an aggressive counterattack.

— A fatal blow has been dealt.

The accurate blows that fell every time he did so!

Weed effectively used Kolderim's Daemon Sword, cleaver of the devil. The Daemon Sword allowed his skills to take flight. It was important to land fatal blows with Strength and damage, but he dealt many small wounds. He killed the Dark Knights after weakening them severely through the 7 overlapping curses of the Daemon Sword. Weed was moving so fantastically that even the armor he was wearing felt like a uselessly heavy load.

The jaws of the onlookers fell open.

"What the hell?"

"How can a person move like that? Is he seeing the attacks of the Dark Knights?"

"That's not something you can do just by seeing the attacks. He's striking the sword he's swinging in the center to change their directions."

Scenes they couldn't believe even after rubbing their eyes were cropping up one after another.

Beginner Warriors or Knights fought while getting hit by most of

the attacks, trusting their Toughness, skills, and armor. Even if they accumulated a certain amount of skill, they were only at the level of using their shields or putting their weapons up front to block. Weed dodged the enemy's attacks by a finger's width, pierced the vital points, and slipped out. If they had known that Weed was restraining a lot of his skills, the people might have even fallen into severe self-doubt and frustration.

“Even the videos of famous Swordsmen on the Versailles Continent weren't at this level.”

“Still, does he have no sense of fear at all? How can he run in front in a situation like that?”

“I recognized him when he fought riding the wyvern. A fight like that is really too natural for Weed!”

A battle on par with what the onlookers had thought of was unfolding before their eyes. They could only be fascinated by Weed's natural movements alone. They wouldn't have been this surprised if he had a high level or fought while using skills, but the movement of his body itself was a work of art.

Scenes of a fight that looked as if he was enjoying battle and controlling every movement!

The players knew how incredible Weed's current actions were.

“His stats and skills, all of it is optimized.”

“He's putting everything he has into battle.”

The ordinary standard for high leveled players was using their character's techniques well. They decided on various attack skills to match the situation and fought to win.

In comparison, like a person born for battle, Weed showed precise judgement and movements.

Even if the characters were the same, their performance in battle could only be different based on how they fought. In a brawling game, it was like the difference between heaven and earth even if characters with the same ability were used to fight.

A normal human wouldn't leap right into the middle of the Dark Knights swinging swords, and they wouldn't even try to strike those swords to slip past. No, they wouldn't overdo it by fighting the Dark Knights in the first place and would choose to safely gather more teammates.

When onlookers who had rushed over without reserve saw Weed's battle, there was something that made their blood boil. It drew them into wild excitement, and they were absorbed in the battle.

“There were over 10 Dark Knights, but he's really hunting them with 4 people. It ought to be possible if they were a party in the late 300s, but…”

“Just look at that Painter over there! She's wearing a tunic with a

level 30 requirement."

"Is she really under level 50?"

"Her profession is a Painter. She's not even joining in the battle, just doodling."

Yurin was drawing the overpowering Dark Knights wearing the formal, solemn armor as no-good cavemen. With bushy beards and nose hairs sticking out, they were wearing elastic tights rather than armor.

"The weapon the Shaman has equipped isn't good either?"

"She's an extremely famous Shaman in Morata. I was in the same party as her once before, but… she's not even level 250."

"You mean she's hunting Dark Knights even so? It's ridiculous even if Weed is there."

"The Shaman is impressive too, and I've never seen a Dancer getting so aggressively involved in a battle. If only I could also dance with a charming Dancer like her…"

When the onlookers were spewing praise, Weed's expression was apathetic.

'This is boring.'

The ability of the Dark Knights was impressive. They were knights, and they rained down heavy and substantial attacks, so you couldn't be careless. If he was level 300 like before, he would have hunted with great excitement since they were monsters that were objectively stronger than himself. But since Weed was now level 370, he could defeat them fairly comfortably. Having grown while struggling in disadvantageous situations, opponents that were perfect for others merely made Weed sleepy.

'Too weak.'

Even after hunting several Dark Knights at once, he thought of this much as insignificant.

Even after entering the underground prison, Weed easily slaughtered the monsters. He was able to hunt the monsters so simply that it was futile since Hwaryeong put them to sleep. That was also because he couldn't take hits from the Dark Knights on purpose in order to raise his Toughness since there were many onlookers. Because this was after he made the sculpture, his Health and Mana recovery speeds were at a tremendous level, so he would be slow to tire even after fighting and fighting.

Monks of the Embinyu Church appeared before Weed. They were a very strong and rather quick mob that used punches or kicks as their main arsenals.

Weed overlapped another skill onto Sculpting Blade. It was a possible attack because Sculpting Blade was a technique that applied purely to Sword Mastery itself.

“15 Chain Strike.”

Ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-bam!

He ran in without reserve and mercilessly beat them up with his sword. He had absolutely no mercy, and made no allowance for generosity, either.

“Hammer Fist!”

When the Monks were barely able to extend their fists, he stood and took that much. Weed's equips were considerable, so taking a few hits from the Monks' hits was fine.

“Did you hit me just now?”

Weed's eyes twitched. His Perseverance or Toughness didn't even rise from taking those fumbling hits. He didn't really need to bear it and get hit when his stats didn't even go up!

“15 Chain Strike!”

Pa-ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-bam!

He violently beat up the Monks. He beat them here, beat them there, chased and beat them, and beat them once more because it was a waste to use a skill right before they died. His sword rampaged as he mercilessly thrashed the Monks. It was to the extent that the onlookers felt sorry for the Monks of the Embinyu Church.

His Mana recovery speed was so fast that it quickly refilled again even if he used a skill.

“Weed! For you to come this far…! I heard much about your dirty crimes. I will take the Embinyu Church's revenge.”

The Elite Dark Knight approached him in the underground prison with his mantle fluttering. If it were someone other than Weed, an exciting and tense atmosphere might have formed.

“Elite Dark Knight, you did well to show up as well. Sword Kaiser!”

He dodged the Elite Dark Knight's attack and activated his ultimate attack skill head on!

“Argh!”

The Elite Dark Knight was flung to the opposite wall insignificantly.

— The Elite Dark Knight has fallen into a state of panic from a great shock.

Weed raised his sword and thrashed it.

“Then why'd you show up, hurry and die. Die! Die!”

The Elite Dark Knight dropped a shoulder guard and lost its life in vain.

“Equipment!”

Weed licked his lower lip with his tongue. This was a situation where he was wetting his lips with greed and thirst was rising in his

throat.

“While you're like this, I guess I'll gather some Sword Mastery and attack skill proficiency!”

Babaaam!

Crunch! Boom! Whaam!

“EEEK!”

Powowowow!

Engrossing himself in just hunting without thinking of raising his stats for defense, all that was left were the gruesome remains of monsters.

The onlookers following him from behind drifted further and further away.

“Euu…”

“So this is why they say the places where Weed has gone through are sucked dry of monsters.

“To think his personality was this dirty. He isn't saving even a single one and just beating them again and again and again.”

“Did you see just now? He hit a monster that already died another three times before it hit the ground.”

“I've never seen a hunting method that kills monsters like that.”

“His notoriety wasn't just false rumors.”

The onlookers backed off quickly, fearing the human who was hunting with such a dirty nature! Even though they backed off a distance, they could still hear Weed's words. It was a conversation he was having after wiping out five mobs of Dark Knights and disciples of the Embinyu Church.

“Let's fight faster.”

“How?”

“Angry Pebbles, come out.”

Eight premium fire spirits were summoned with his overflowing Mana. The spirits with blazing, red-hot bodies went on their hands and knees before Weed and raised a fiery show as they acted charmingly. It appeared that Weed's control over the spirits had reached it's height.

“Did you call, our creator who is the most outstanding being under this sky!”

“You guys, go play with fire a bit. From the end of the passage on this side, set everything on fire in order.”

“Understood, Master.”

Weed knew about the blocked paths of the complicated underground prison from the expedition. There were traps in the passages and monsters were teeming as well.

“Make sure that you check and only choose the places without people to set on fire,” Weed warned. If a place where parties were

hunting was set on fire and they happened to die, he could become a murderer.

"We shall devote our lives to fulfil thy command. It is a great honor that you did not forget us and entrusted this task."

Dark Knights and monsters were piled up in the blocked passages of the underground prison.

"Rawr."

"Kekeke."

The dry air in the passages where the monsters were became hotter and hotter.

"RAAAGGHH!"

Spittle went flying as the monsters suffered! Once the flames rose explosively from the blocked passages, they screamed in anguish as they scrambled out.

"It's the harvest. 15 Chain Strikes!"

Weed killed every flaming monster that emerged.

Like a skilled farmer wielding a sickle, he precisely aimed for the throats, heads, and vital points of the monsters.

"*This* is the taste of hunting."

Monsters fell in swathes in front of Weed. When japtem and equips dropped as monsters turned to grey light, Weed sorted the expensive ones and put them onto Yellowy's back even in the middle of fighting. His hands moved with unparalleled business.

"Wah! That's really ridiculous."

"Is it even possible to hunt like this?"

The onlookers had never seen hunting like this. A normal hunting party would hunt camped out in one corner of the passage or clearing. They would also chat, make food to eat, and take breaks. If the speed of the monster appearances was slow, they would move while doing more hunting. When they did so, the party leader would entrust matters to a Thief, Adventurer, or Assassin, since they had to look for traces of monsters and chase them. Finding monsters well while considering the party members' states was the leader's responsibility. Therefore, knowing the geography and being aware of the characteristics of monsters while raising hunting efficiency was the standard.

However, Weed was different. His hunting range wasn't fixed in a narrow passage or a single spot. He took the characteristic of this enormous underground prison, this dungeon, into consideration and put the entire area around him into his hunting range.

"His EXP must be rising really damn well."

"Just look at the japtem. His hunting speed is fast so tons of items are also being dropped."

The onlookers could only be extremely jealous!

This was a hunting method that Weed could only show because his Mana recovery speed had quickened. It was Weed's way to fight while managing his Vitality and Mana well, but there was still an obvious limit. It was also comfortable since he took care of the tricky monsters that were daunting to deal with after Hwaryeong put them to sleep with her Seduction Dance. Thanks to Da'in having impressive skills as a Shaman, she gave very effective support in battle. His Agility increased and his Strength grew as well, enabling him to nullify the attacks of the Dark Knights more precisely. The fighting became comfortable and much easier thanks to Da'in.

* * *

One of the parties that had been hunting in the underground prison was taking a break.

“Phew.”

A Warrior wiped the sweat dripping on his forehead. “The level of the monsters here is enormous.”

The Cleric also plopped down without even thinking of smoothing his crumpled robe. “I've got to boast to my friends when we get back to Morata. We're seriously hunting in this underground prison.”

“We oughta be able to hunt even better if we brought teammates…”

“Pft. Don't even say that, 'cause there shouldn't be many people who are hunting while raising their EXP as nicely as we are.”

“We fought a whole *seven times* in 2 hours. That's an incredible combat record.”

“It's the fastest battling I've had all year. Lots of monsters come out, so it's a really good spot for hunting.”

“It *is* a bit lacking since we only have 7 party members this time. Next time, let's add another high damage Swordsman and Magician each and try a proper hunt.”

They were chatting while taking a break when 11 vicious Heretic Hunters of the Embinyu Church approached them from the passage.

The party members took up their weapons and rose from their seats.

“They're not giving us a chance to rest.”

“What should we do? There's still some distance between us, so should we run?”

Just when they were worriedly sharing their opinions, a huge creature and people approached the location of the Heretic Hunters. A man equipped with jet-black Talrok's Armor, helmet, and gloves ran in speedily. After him, an old mercenary and three ladies came riding in

on a large and brawny black cow.

“Seductive Dance!”

A Dancer who got off the cow distracted the Heretic Hunters as she danced. The Shaman used magic.

“Wavering eyes, amplify horror to make them see what they do not want to see most.”

The willpower of the Heretic Hunters was very vulnerable, and they were men, so their gazes were easily stolen by Hwaryeong's dance. Da'in's high-proficiency magic was invoked in that opening. Da'in didn't even come down from Yellowy's back.

“Embinyu God, hast thou forsaken me?”

“I am a heretic. Judge me!”

While the Heretic Hunters were screaming, Weed brandished his sword. “15 Chain Strikes!”

His swordsmanship didn't back away or halt. With swordsmanship that added to his strength as he advanced, he precisely sliced only the weak points of the Heretic Hunters. His Strength, Agility, and overall fighting ability were amplified due to Dain's buff magic.

“15 Chain Strikes!”

He used effective skills for group hunting without reserve as he bore down on the Heretic Hunters. The Heretic Hunters braced for battle and swung their weapons, but they were helpless. They were cursed every time Weed's sword sliced past, and their bodies burned in flames, insects crawled over them, or their hair turned into stringy snakes. At the end of the battle, Yurin got down from Yellowy and simply picked up the japtem.

“Run!”

Having cleared the Heretic Hunters in an instant, they ran off to their next destination. The party's appearance, hunting, and movement happened like a flash of lightning! Monsters collided with each other as they were ran over from afar with a wave of heat. The party headed towards that group of monsters, fought them in an instant, and went off to yet another location.

The people who had been hunting there originally muttered dazedly.

“What the hell is this?”

“For them to defeat the Heretic Hunters so fast… did you see the swordsman's footwork? Even if it's a skill, how can he run in at the enemy at that angle? He went around to the enemy's back way too easily and knifed 'em, though he did get hit a few times.”

“Didn't it really seem like he was just letting himself get hit because it was annoying to dodge?”

Not 5 minutes since they had left, a swarm of people tumbled in from the passage in the direction where Weed, Yellowy, and the

others had appeared. They were the onlookers who had been following since the River of Lamentation vicinity.

“Excuse me.”

“Yes?”

“Did Weed and his teammates pass through here?”

“Weed?”

“Wargod Weed. He didn't come this way?”

A young Warrior spoke urgently and anxiously, as if he had missed something important!

“I don't know such a person… Ah, a party that came in riding a black cow did kill Heretic Hunters and went past.”

“Heretic Hunters!” The other onlookers who had also come asked, “How many were there?”

“11 of them.”

“11 of them! How many minutes did it take to defeat them?”

“Huh, how should I say how long it took… it really happened in a brief moment.”

“Please tell us anyway.”

“Roughly about 2 to 3 minutes?”

“So fast!”

The spectators cheered as they ran off to where Weed and Yellowy had disappeared.

“What was that just now?”

“Maybe… was Weed *that* Weed? Wargod Weed! He's hunting in the underground prison!”

* * *

As she breathlessly followed Weed, Da'in was able to feel it.

'He's really… grown a lot.'

She had offered to party together with the Sculptor she'd met in Lavias because the sight of him hunting alone without teammates had been pitiful. Despite the limitations to the Sculptor profession, she had been able to feel a strong will from him as he fought monsters with all his might. The Sculptor who had raised his Perseverance by going as far as to take hits from monsters on purpose now wielded Blacksmithing and Tailoring skills. He had made food for her in Lavias as well, but his Cooking skill had also risen to Intermediate in their time apart. He even dragged a bull named Yellowy along with him.

“This slow-witted cow.”

Mooooooooo!

“Yurin, if you have any paint left over, paint him yellow.”

Moooooooooooo!

While they were resting for a bit after repeated battling, the sight of them squabbling with the sculpture lifeform named Yellowy was also cheerful. Yurin and even Hwaryeong played while chiming in.

“Oppa, he's gonna be eaten anyways, so why dye him?”

“They say the black pigs of Jeju are very nutritious and tasty; just leave him black.”

[T/N: Jeju is Korea's largest island, known for its tourism, scenery, and apparently its pigs.]

MOOO!

Yellowy wailed sorrowfully and pitifully. However, he wasn't always treated unkindly. When mealtime rolled around, Weed gave him very nutritious hay, even though there was no knowing when he had gotten it. Yurin fed him herbs that she had on hand, and kind Hwaryeong got water and washed his face and body.

* * *

The second day of hunting in the underground prison!

In the wee hours of the day, when others had gone to sleep, Weed woke up early and was logged in. As he moved deeper into the dungeon and logged off, the spectators weren't able to follow him any longer. Weed was practicing the handling of a light sculpture using the time away from the people. Da'in had also logged in early, so it was just the two of them.

Weed was silently engrossed in the light sculpture. There was a heavy mood between the two of them.

'This is a chance to talk with him.'

Da'in started speaking first, with difficulty. “Excuse me.”

“Yes?”

Weed's response was blunt and rather guarded. He had been the same way when she had met him for the first time in Lavias. He was suspicious from the start, as if wondering if she was going to steal his japtem even though they had simply met by chance in the dungeon.

“What sculpture are you making now?”

Colorful lights matched every movement of Weed's hand. He wasn't using just one light, but diverse colors intertwined and mixed as they brought about countless changes. They grew when he flicked his arm, and the lights scattered brilliantly when he bent his wrist.

“It is nothing, just for practice.”

The sculpture Weed was making was gradually taking the form of a person, like a mannequin. Da'in sat still next to him and only spectated the use of light sculpting. Since Weed was trying to make a shape by utilizing strands of light, it was no easy matter. There were

countless colors, so it was also try to make them suit each other.

Da'in couldn't handle the heavy silence that followed the halt in the conversation and spoke up again.

“Is there a girl that you like?”

After asking that, she worried inwardly. She had asked something that she'd always been curious about after seeing that he had made the Goddess Freya Statue in Morata based on Hwaryeong's face. Da'in hoped that he would say that he still liked her.

Weed shook his head. “There isn't.”

Stifling her disappointment with effort, Da'in replied, “Ah, is that so. Please excuse me for asking something unnecessary.”

“No, it's fine.”

Weed absorbed himself in the sculpture again. Though his concentration was strong and he made a sculpture even in his break time, his attitude was strangely different from usual. When there was another person with him, he had never ignored someone who tried to have a conversation. However, distressed by the words Weed had spoken, Da'in didn't realize that.

'We've already said goodbye once, so it's fine if he doesn't like me.'

Da'in contained her pounding heart and spoke up again. “Then… is there a girl you liked in the past?”

Though she sometimes acted unexpectedly and had many strange sides to her to the extent of healing monsters like Ghouls, she mustered an immense amount of courage to ask that question.

Weed's fingers stopped for a moment, trembling a little and tense. However, he soon suppressed it and replied.

“There's no girl that I used to like.”

“Goodness!” Da'in smiled with an effort. “Then you've never told anyone that you liked them, not even once?”

“Yes, because there was no one I liked.”

Da'in bit her lip. To think there was a guy who would discourage a lass so coldheartedly.

“I see. There's something I have to do for a bit, so I'll be leaving now.”

Weed didn't even look at her when replying. “Please do so.”

“Then…”

Da'in logged out.

“Phew.”

Weed collected the light sculpting. The lights that had dazzled his eyes disappeared, and the dungeon became dark. There was only the crackling of the bonfire he had lit to boil water and prepare the food as it burned.

“Yellowy.”

Mooooooo!

Sitting on the bare ground, Yellow raised his head and replied.

“Do you know who the girl was just now?”

Moooo!

Yellowy slapped his short tail on the ground as he tilted his ears. He might get a ton of nagging if he pretended to ignore Weed.

Weed spoke calmly. “My first love.”

The first love that a man could never forget. He couldn't forget the memories made with his first love even with the passage of time.

“Her name is Da'in… her profession is Shaman. I met first met her in Lavias.”

He hadn't been able to recognize her at first sight, as her appearance had changed greatly due to the curse. However, she was the one who listened to the other person well and had been so enjoyable to talk to that he had spoken to her about everything. He got the feeling of her from just her greeting and the few words she spoke. As a Shaman, the skill proficiency that could be called unequaled and the order by which she used various support magics were the same. She had simply cast her support magic in the order that was comfortable for her, like a habit. But from the perspective of Weed on the receiving end, he was able to distinctly realize who she was in the instant that she used the support magic.

“Da'in. It was her. How could I have forgotten someone so important?”

Those were Weed's inner feelings, which he hadn't betrayed when the girls had been present.

“I was glad to see her since it's been a while. Just that she is alive is… but does she want to forget the past since she finished the surgery and is living a new life? I don't know why she pretended to not know me, but there must be some situation or reason.”

Yellowy stared at Weed with clear, large eyes. Reflected in his innocent eyes was the sight of one man being sad with his shoulders slumped.

Chapter 9: Lonely Wanderer

◊ ◊ ◊

The SwordNoobs divided and got employed as Training Hall instructors for the Orc Village and Rosenheim Kingdom. The salary was low, so they were able to easily get the position because no one wanted to work there. After getting employed, the SwordNoobs were completely entrusted with the Training Hall's management.

“Those who want to learn the sword, come to the Training Hall!”

However, the majority of the players reacted indifferently.

“Training Hall? That's just a place to hit scarecrows.”

“Why would you do something so annoying to learn Sword Mastery? If you just go out and fight, you'll learn it anyways.”

The SwordNoobs were sneered at by even the beginners! Still, there were quite a few curious beginner players who sought out the Training Hall. They had visited the Training Hall because they couldn't leave the city and village for 4 weeks when they first started.

“You hold the sword like this, and… rather than swinging it powerfully, you must swing it accurately. Don't just blindly put your sword in front of you; you must watch the monster's actions and attack their gaps in their defense.”

As they had a lot of experience from the dojo, the SwordNoobs taught the beginners with ease.

“If you go to the Training Hall, they teach you how to fight.”

“Is there a need to learn?”

“It's definitely better if you do. People who've learned are completely different from people who haven't in hunting.”

It was enough to change the cries for recruiting party members in the square.

“Recruiting Swordsman. Only taking a person who has learned from the Training Hall for at least a day.”

It was true that the combat ability of the majority of the beginning players was lacking. There was no reason for them to have experienced intense physical activity or fighting, and it was easy for them to panic at speedy monsters. Once they learned how to use the sword from the SwordNoobs, hunting was definitely easier. Since the SwordNoobs taught them how to deal with facing different kinds of monsters, players even sought them from other kingdoms as well and waited in line.

Every time the SwordNoobs held a lesson, people gathered in swarms. There was news that 500 to 1,000 beginner players would sit and watch the demonstration of the SwordNoobs.

“The sword is sharp, isn't it? You don't have to be afraid of it, because a properly learned sword will protect you and your teammates.”

SwordNoob501's lesson was smooth. He had his own charm because he was nearly the youngest in the dojo, and he knew how to serve his older brothers properly. To adults, he was like a nephew, and to the young students, he was as friendly as an older brother.

“So cool.”

“He looks a bit intimidating, but I think he's a good person.”

A man looked the coolest whent he was devoting himself to his work!

As they committed themselves to swordsmanship while soaked in sweat in the dojo, the masters and disciples were sufficiently attractive. It was just that the women hadn't had a chance to see that.

Working as an instructor in the Orc Village, SwordNoob419 showed a demonstration as he swung his sword. He had to move slowly so that the beginners could follow him.

“Chwiik. I can't do it right, instructor.”

The movements weren't easy for the Orc females due to their characteristic sloshing stomach fat and rumps. Whenever that happened, the trainee instructors went right to work.

“This part like this…”

They would lightly grip a waist or hold a wrist and draw out the trajectory of the sword. Naturally occurring skinship! Satisfied smiles appeared on the lips of the SwordNoob disciples who were acting as instructors.

“Instructor, you're so reliable.”

“If you have time, could you come hunt with us? Chwi chwit.”

They readily accepted requests from female Orcs.

“Of course.”

As they fought together, the instructors taught them how to fight.

“I'm Leiachwi. Chwik. Could we learn again next time?”

“I'm SwordNoob419.”

Even the friend requests that the SwordNoobs had wanted so dearly came along smoothly.

“Can we come visit the dojo while you're on break?”

“Let's, have a date at an amusement park.”

Due to the aggressive female players, there was even the birth of disciples who went and had their first meetings. Having bravely finished their dates, the disciples spoke of their heroic exploits.

“I went to the amusement park with her, and… huhu. Sahyungs, colleagues, don't be surprised! I grabbed her hand first.”

[T/N: Sahyung is the polite way to address an older brother in training.]

“Noob419! You crazy? What'll you do if you get slapped for that…”

“Do you think I would have done that on purpose? We were looking at the fountain when our hands somehow touched, and she stayed still so I held it.”

“She stayed still?”

“How should I say it, it was like I got the strange feeling from her that it was okay if I took her hand.”

“There's something like that? It's not that you get slapped for just holding a girl's hand?”

“It's like, a feeling you can only know once you've experienced it.”

The masters and disciples burned with their dreams of dating as they received the teachings of their dating seniors.

Female players weren't the only ones who learned swordsmanship from them. There were as many men as women who learned how to use the sword from them in masses. Women and men of all ages crowded into the Training Hall. It was because ever since their Sword Mastery skill rose to Advanced, there was a change in their ability as instructors. If they taught while showing swordsmanship demonstrations, the beginners would copy that swordsmanship. Even with that alone, the beginners' Sword Mastery proficiency grew rather quickly.

Beginner players who thought of themselves as disciples flocked over.

“Please teach me, instructor!”

“I want to hunt. Please lead us to the right path.”

“At what time is today's lesson?”

* * *

At the news that the SwordNoobs would raise your Sword Mastery skill, tons of people gathered. Even people who had left the village after 4 weeks and had been hunting returned to the Training Hall. There were also a considerable number of middle-range players who were over level 200. The Training Hall where scarecrows were set up was changed into a learning ground for actual martial arts by the SwordNoobs. It was annoying for the disciples because there were more people, but they received people as their students as long as there was an enthusiasm to learn. Even though the complete beginners had no money, they were taken in as students.

“The admission fee to become an official disciple is 9 pieces of barley bread.”

“Ack!”

“You cannot become a true fighter if you do not know hunger. Hunger awakens the fundamental strength of a human being.”

The students of the SwordNoobs, men and women of all ages, were spreading throughout the Versailles Continent.

Their robust shoulders and piercing eyes, as well as the tacit conversations they held amongst themselves, circulated through Rosenheim Kingdom and the Yurokina Mountains.

A group with a sword inscribed on the left sides of their chests looked for teammates in the square.

“It's a pleasure.”

[T/N: The speech from here on out is in a very manly, archaic style.]

“Long time no see. I believe I saw you once at the Training Hall. Shall we go hunting?”

“Sounds good. But how old are you?”

“Nineteen.”

“We're the same age. What is your lineage?”

“My master is SwordNoob385-nim.”

“I received the teachings of SwordNoob417-nim, sahyung.”

The SwordNoobs were being called teachers of the sword in Rosenheim Kingdom and the Yurokina Mountains.

The SwordNoobs didn't forget their aspiration of hunting the strongest monsters on the Versailles Continent, either.

“We have honor to upkeep, too. Shouldn't we catch something like a Bone Dragon or Imoogi within one month?”

They occasionally hunted even while instructing, and they also strove to raise their Sword Mastery skill. The Sword Mastery skill could be raised pretty quickly if you fought and overcame monsters stronger than yourself. The SwordNoobs didn't even pay any attention to weak monsters that they could easily kill. Most of their Fame went up purely through hunting. Even a steep cliff was absurdly turned into a flatland if just two SwordNoobs got together.

“Sahyung, I'm bored; would you like to go up here?”

“Looks fun.”

The SwordNoobs heightened their concentration as they climbed up the cliffs of the Yurokina Mountains. It was a chance for them to gain the precious experience of going through difficult, dangerous terrain on purpose. SwordNoob4 and SwordNoob5 went up along the ridge of the cliff, where it was difficult to take even one stride.

“Noob5.”

“Yes, sahyung?”

“Would we die if we fell from here?”

They were so dizzyingly high up that there were clouds on the mountainside. SwordNoob5 looked down from the ridge and shook his

head.

“We would live. We could grab the branches of trees growing out while falling and use the rebound to bounce up. Then should be able to lodge a short sword in the rock and slide down.”

“Hm, we wouldn't die from this much after all, eh?”

“Of course.”

“I'm bored, so do you want to try jumping down from here?”

They readily said words that would astonish others if they were to hear. Even though their skill proficiency would be reduced, their level would fall, and they could even lose equipment they were wearing on the one in ten thousand chance that they died, they had no qualms. SwordNoob5 took it in as if it was nothing as well.

“That seems like it'd be fun?”

“I'll jump first.”

It was a short distance to the edge, but SwordNoob4 leapt off the ridge at full speed.

They were living as freely as the wind while having tastes of challenges.

* * *

After entering the underground prison, Weed arrived at the place where the prisoners of the Matallost Church were being held within four days. He would have been able to shorten the time far more if he had focused solely on breaking through. However, he sucked the area dry of monsters as he advanced, so it took longer.

It would have taken a little longer to destroy that many monsters with Weed's damage alone, but Yellow's participation in battle was a big help, too. When they were on the plains, there were many times when Weed mounted him and used him mostly like a horse because it was the innocent Yellowy. If he fought while speeding about like a horse, that alone would raise EXP and running proficiency. In a dungeon where there wasn't much space to run, Weed used Yellowy mostly for gathering japtem. But this time, Yellowy found a valuable use for himself. He would unleash a powerful kick with his hind legs on the Dark Knights that Hwaryeong had put to sleep with Seduction Dance.

A bull's back kick!

When he kicked them powerfully with his tremendous strength, the Dark Knights went flying brutally. It was as good as a Sword Kaiser attack. Having received an enormous blow, it was powerful enough to make the Dark Knights die in an instant if Da'in and Hwaryeong just stabbed with a cudgel or shortsword. As the girls

started taking care of the Heretic Hunters, Disciples, and other monsters with Yellowy, their hunting efficiency improved even more.

Moooooooo!

Like a fighting bull, Yellowy savored his victory whenever he struck monsters with his hind legs.

“Well done, Yellowy.”

When Da'in stroked his head, Yellowy enjoyed it while slapping his short tail. Weed had spoken a little of his sad woes regarding Da'in, but Yellowy didn't pay any attention to that and got along well with Da'in. There wasn't a proverb saying that speaking into a cow's ear was like knocking at a deaf man's door for nothing.

Weed briefly assessed that the battle speed had become faster.

“He's finally worth the cost of his grass.” Weed was infinitely stingy with his praise! Since Yellowy was earnestly carrying around a bag and even taking part in battle, even slightly positive words came from Weed. “What's the market price of Korean cows these days? Before a person who'll buy meat at a high price shows up, it'll be better not to sell him.”

Breaking through the underground prison! It was a very large labyrinth, but Weed didn't even struggle in the middle of it. It was a dungeon that others had already explored, so he had determined the overall path through Dirtman and had run over with precision.

The priests of the Matallost Church were emaciated and wearing robes black with dirt.

“Who are you?”

“I defeated the Embinyu Church and came to bring you back.” Weed showed them a relic of the Matallost Church. Only then did the priests believe him.

“Why have you come only now to save us?”

“Dang, I thought us old guys would be locked up here forever and just die.”

They were actually irritated that he hadn't saved them quickly. If you didn't go through a quest earnestly, these kinds of complaints would come up.

Weed also had much to complain about. 'I came here as fast as I could after making sculptures, selling japtem, and selling off the quest. I did the best that I could.'

He had pride that allowed him to justify himself in any situation! Other players would lack the patience and could've even gotten angry at the old priests for being so unscrupulous, but Weed wasn't like that.

“I apologize. It was because I was trying to convey you safely, as remnants of the Embinyu Church may have been hiding. For now, please come out with us.” Since the old priests were also his clients, he didn't forget to put on a friendly smile.

“In any case, thank you for coming to rescue us.”

The priests rose from their seats. Weed was able to easily release them from the shackle-like apparatuses on their ankles even though he wasn't a Thief. He used his Blacksmithing skill to get rid of them altogether. There was no way he would miss out on a chance to get good iron material.

“Please release us, too!”

Many other prisoners were tied up in the place where the priests of the Matallost Church had been held. There were 35 people from Dwarf, Elf, Barbarian, and hunter races who were scattered in the North on a small scale. Weed released all of them as well.

At around that time, the people who had received the Rescue the Prisoners of the Matallost Church quest and had been hunting in the area gathered.

“What, he's here already?”

“How did he come so quickly?”

The participants of the quest that had dumbfounded them hadn't thought he would arrive so quickly, even if he *was* Weed.

It was now time to leave the underground prison. The path out of the prison wasn't very difficult — they were able to leave quickly because the spectators who had followed Weed in were hunting in the important points of the underground prison and the players who were participating in the quest cleaned up the monsters.

“We give you our thanks for saving us.”

“I simply did what I had to do.”

“There is something we must do as soon as possible, so would you wait for a moment?”

“Yes. If it is a righteous deed, I will wait however long it takes.”

Under the watchful gaze of Weed and the quest participants, the Matallost Church's priests went to the temple, cleaned, and lit torches. Then they performed a ritual that appeased the vengeful spirits of the River of Lamentation.

SWOOSH!

Then the stagnant and murky waters of the River of Lamentation flowed smoothly downstream.

Ding!

> Rescue the Prisoners of the Matallost Church
>
> The River of Lamentation has been revived.
>
> The river that flows with the tears of the souls who suffered unfair deaths!
>
> The priests of the Matallost Church will repent their errors that sprung from greed and resume the work of

guiding souls.

— Contribution to the Matallost Church has increased by 2,700.

— Level has increased.

— With the purification of the River of Lamentation, Fame has increased by 320.

— Faith has increased by 37.

— Luck has increased by 4.

It was quite a considerable compensation. The reward was from the Matallost Church that guided with death becoming active again.

Weed hadn't explored the underground prison to save the prisoners. He had left most of the annoying tasks to other players, but even so, his level went up by 1.

Yurin, Da'in, and the other players went up 10 to 20 levels thanks to the huge EXP they earned as a reward.

“Yahoo!”

“This quest is the best!”

To those who had participated, it was a quest that had given them a big reward that was tough to swap with any kind of treasure.

Weed didn't get butthurt over the level ups of the others. Naturally, you would get stronger if your level went up. However, stats or skill proficiency were more important than that. If you only raised your level quickly, then in the end, your stats would fall short of your raised level. That would make your growth lag, so it was actually faster to backtrack quite a bit.

As the change from the completion of the quest, the contaminated River of Lamentation that had been murky with yellowness slowly became clearer.

— As the River of Lamentation has gradually come to perform its role, the seed of unrest in the Versailles Continent has decreased.

Health will decline due to death and the chance of misfortune decreases by 13 %. When raising Undeads, Necromancers will need a little more Mana.

The old mercenary Smith spoke heavily. “So this is what happened. The Matallost Church… I thought it was a church that had only harmed the Versailles Continent…”

Ding!

Old Smith's Second Curiosity Completed

The old drunkard Smith has come to know the truth about the Count Savoid's true identity and the Matallost Church.

The very curious old mercenary was able to resolve one of the not-quite-right memories of his past.

— Fame has increased by 260.

— The prerequisites for the Agent of the Niflheim Empire quest have been completed.

The A-rank difficulty quest was resolved. He had taken Smith and had proceeded with the River of Lamentation purification and the fight with the pursuers of the Embinyu Church. It wasn't just the resolution of Smith's curiosity about Count Savoid; it had to be regarded as the resolution of a part of the entire chain quest as well.

The old Mercenary Smith said, “Then come anytime to the tavern where I was. Since it's you who gave me lots of alcohol, I should be able to buy you a drink. I know quite a lot, so ask if there's anything you're curious about anytime.”

That was the poor Mercenary Smith's absurdly scanty reward. How much wine and brandy had he gulped up until now… However, Weed didn't argue. He had received many unreasonable quests because of his uncontrollably high Fame. There were times when the reward was big, but there were also times when it was small.

He tried to be understanding with an open mind. 'Looks like I'll have a nightmare tonight.'

In exchange, he resolved to write a ton of insults about Smith in his journal.

“I gained many experiences because I was able to do this with you, elder. It is a pity that we cannot travel the Versailles Continent together anymore.”

The Mercenary Smith laughed, revealing the gaps in his sparse teeth. “It's time for the old me to return to the tavern. It's enough that I did adventures when I was young. Even if I do have a curiosity, I don't think I'll be able to move in person anymore. That's right, I shouldn't need my mercenary card anymore, either. I'll give it to you.”

— You have acquired an S-rank Mercenary Card of the Proam Alliance Guild.

Weed wasn't one to refuse a gift or bribe given to him.

“Identify!”

Proam Alliance Guild Mercenary Card:
Durability: 30/30.

A mercenary card made with bronze.
Grade: S

Option: Can carry out all Mercenary guild quests as desired. Can receive 200 % more for request fees.

It was a mercenary card, which could be called a precious treasure for Mercenaries; even if they weren't Mercenaries, many people used the Mercenary guild to receive quests.

'It should be good if I sell it off.'

Considering the scarcity of mercenary cards on top of that, he would be able to get an enormous price for it. He could tell from the just fact that the players who had gone through the Rescue the Prisoners of the Matallost Church quest with him were all astir over it.

The old Mercenary Smith gave him another gift. “Take this as well.”

Weed took it as he was told again.

It was an antique seal that had a stamp made of jade and a golden dragon crafted with gold that could be used as a handle. A very old item, its color wasn't like that of goods these days. A part of the jade stamp was also broken.

“Identify!”

Unknown Seal:

Durability 3/20.

This is a very precious object made by an extremely exceptional sculptor.

It is an item that the old Mercenary Smith didn't sell despite his alcohol tabs that accumulated.

Having gone through war and a long period of time, there is slight damage to it.

Option: Grants special good luck.

Weed raised his head. It occurred to him that this was a remarkable item.

“What is this?”

“It's something I picked up in Count Savoid's mansion, back in my Mercenary days. I've been treasuring this seal because it seemed like good luck was coming my way after getting it, but… you can use it

now.”

“I will receive it gratefully.”

Weed put the seal into his pocket.

Ding!

> — You have obtained an imperial treasure of the Niflheim Empire.

It was as he expected beforehand. 'Looks like the Agent of the Niflheim Empire quest will happen with this.'

If he wanted to find out the exact origins of the item, he needed a slightly more powerful identification.

'There's something I have to take care of first.'

Weed looked around. There were many players who were fascinated while watching the transformation of the River of Lamentation. Since it would cause a historical change on the Versailles Continent, it also wasn't hard to see someone busily sending a whisper.

“My level went up by 4. I got a lot of Fame, too.”

“Really? Damn. I should've taken the quest too. I heard the hunting in the underground prison was pretty good?”

He could also see the players who had gotten the Rescue the Prisoners of the Matallost Church quest being happy.

Weed spoke to them. “Everyone.”

“…?”

“The quest did not end with the rescue of the Matallost Church prisoners.”

“It was a chain quest?”

“Then will you share another quest?”

Like a generous man from the countryside, Weed put a big smile on his face as he nodded. “Of course. It's a quest we started together, so shouldn't we see it to the end together?”

Matallost Church's chain quest!

The priests of the Matallost Church were walking towards Weed.

“Though we have been relieved of a great anxiety, there are too many things that must still be done. We also have to pick out new devotees in order to right the church…”

“I get the anxious feeling that there are still those who follow the Embinyu Church in this area.”

The Destruction of the Embinyu Church 11th Sect and the Matallost Church's Long-Cherished Wish requests were still left.

'The remnants of the Embinyu — there ought to be quite a powerful group left over, so they'll probably have to be completely defeated. And for the Matallost Church's Long-Cherished Wish, they'll likely want to take in a lot of devotees and prosper as much as any

other church.'

He could roughly tell what kind of requests were left from their names alone.

It wasn't bad for Morata, either. The Matallost Church was a militant group with considerable holy power! With the heal, blessing, and holy offensive magic they had shown when escaping from the underground prison, there would be quite a lot of people who would want to become devotees. If he allowed beginners to use the movement portal to the River of Lamentation as well, the revival of the Matallost Church would be good for Morata, at least! Even if it was a chain quest, the sweetness of the quest had been sucked dry after destroying the Embinyu Fortress and even rescuing the Matallost Church prisoners. Weed planned on sharing the quests to the others here instead of fulfilling them himself.

“WOAH!”

“The Lord of Morata, Wargod Weed will share the chained quest.”

“Hooray for Morata's Lord!

The people who had been unable to hide their jealousy while looking at the River of Lamentation gathered quickly.

“Please share it with me!”

“Me! Me first!”

They were like baby chicks who were opening their beaks to receive a worm that the momma bird had caught!

Weed spoke. “However, a fixed participation fee of 998 Gold…”

“…”

“…”

There was a calm silence.

Weed's words just spread far and wide. “This is a chance that comes few and far in between. I will cut 30 Gold for those who have brought at least 2 friends or teammates. If at least 7 people apply, I will even give a group discount.”

This was unmistakably a rip off.

Like making excessive profits at a beach in the summer holiday season, it was a rip off they really couldn't refuse!

Only Hwaryeong was smiling prettily as she rejoiced. “How awesome! Weed-nim is even sharing a quest that he got with difficulty to others; he is kind to a fault.”

Chapter 10: Ill-Fated Relationship With Bardray

◊ ◊ ◊

Destruction of the Embinyu Church 11th Sect was a B-rank quest.

“Woaah!”

“Are we gonna fight the Embinyu Church's fighting force?”

“Won't it be too dangerous?”

“Seems really fun.”

Weed sold off the quest and made a whopping 130,000 Gold. He sold to the people who got word from Morata and came late until evening. An exhaustive cash business!

Yellow swayed his pendulous rump happily.

Moooooooooooo!

If his Master was rich, Yellowy hoped that Weed would allow him to chew a stalk of mugwort.

[T/N: Mugwort is an herb used as an ingredient in many dishes.]

However, Weed was heartless. “Even barley bread is expensive, so you'd only be able to pick up some crumbs on a holiday or something… but mugwort? I can't afford to give it to you. I'll mix it with your meat later. Korean cow with mugwort, veggie bibimbap!”

Yellow blinked his big eyes sorrowfully, but that happened every day. Even so, Weed always prepared hay for him, and he got fed herbs from Yurin or Hwaryeong, too. He had no other complaint, but purposefully acted limp, as if he was hungry and had no strength from hunger. He'd been forced to do so much work with his robust physique and strength right after gaining life. Even Yellowy was gaining wisdom about life.

“Looks like it's time to identify this now.”

Weed pulled out the seal he had received from Mercenary Smith. He could basically tell its use from the appearance. It was probably a seal that verified Lords or Nobles as themselves, like Jorudia's Signet. Weed rubbed the dragon part as he examined the unique points of the sculpture.

“Identify!”

> Unknown Emperor's Royal Seal
> Durability 3/20.
>
> A precious royal seal that has weathered the history of the Versailles Continent.

It was made by a sculptor whose limit of skill is hard to estimate.

It is damaged and not in perfect condition.

Artistic Value: 39,600

Options:
Dignity +60.
Charisma +25.
50 % resistance to all magic harmful to the owner's body.
Can intimidate nobles and knights.

Ding!

For examining the Unknown Emperor's Royal Seal in detail, Art stat has risen by 49.

Weed was also a skilled Sculptor who had made many Masterpieces and Magnum Opuses. Every time a sculpture of his was completed, it noisily shook the Versailles Continent.

“Cough!”

A work so incredible that it could even make such a Weed go into convulsions!

The broad stamp made of jade and the golden dragon that looked like it was flying in the sky possessed liveliness and beauty.

“It's old… and feels worn because it's been touched very much, but it's an extremely outstanding work.”

The parts that hands could reach were severely grimy, and much of the pattern had also disappeared. With the long passage of time, its natural dignity had grown.

Jade and gold. The seal had been made with a perfect understanding of the characteristics of the material.

The parts that weren't damaged were detailed and made with a level of skill that even Weed wouldn't have been able to achieve. It looked like a dirty golden dragon from afar, but up close, it felt as if it would come to life and move at any moment.

“I knew it wasn't a normal work, but who could really make such a sculpture?”

There was one person who vaguely came to mind.

If it was an emperor's royal seal, then it didn't need to be said more than once that it would be treasured preciously. Even so, the royal seal had endured so much time that it had become this worn.

A video of some kind began to play for Weed — it was a memory kept within the sculpture.

An old man wearing ordinary cloth attire was sculpting.

In a huge royal palace, knights and magicians were lying prostrate with extreme politeness.

Slice, slice.

The form of a dragon was being made under the old man's sculpting knife. The knife moved slowly, as if time itself was holding its breath.

He shaved the places needing to be shaved and added to the places needing to be added. Only normal movements of the hand could be seen, but the golden dragon that was being created possessed such nobility that one could not tear their eyes away from it.

Whenever the sculpting knife moved, there was a worry that he might possibly make a mistake that would ruin this great work. However, when the sculpting knife sliced past, the figure was transforming into statue steadily nearing completion with such surety that the nervousness was laughable.

A treasure! A golden dragon and stamp that seemed as if they would heighten even *his* dignity with their radiant beauty!

It was the birth of the royal seal.

“May this be the item that symbolizes me,” declared the old man who made the seal.

The knights and magicians then cried out. “We accept the will of His Majesty!”

It didn't end there. There were countless sculptures across the royal palace! They were similar to the humans, but the sculptures with superior physical conditions, the animal sculptures, the bird sculptures, and sculptures that looked like monsters all opened their mouths at the same time.

“We accept the will of our Master!”

* * *

SwordNoob let out a deep sigh.

“I'm really too old. Even meeting a woman is difficult because I'm old.”

The instructors and disciples were meeting Orcs, Dark Elves, or Humans and more or less getting along. They made girlfriends and also hunted in parties.

“I heard even SwordNoob16 held hands with his girlfriend.”

“When?”

“Within thirty-seven days, apparently.”

“Woah, that's fast! Is it okay to progress so quickly?”

“The truly fast one is someone else. SwordNoob401 already went

arm-in-arm to the movie theatre."

"Damn, all the way to the movie theatre! He's a fellow who unusually disliked things like movies, isn't he. Didn't he fall asleep snoring while watching the movie?"

"I'm told he watched an action movie. After the movie ended, he showed his girlfriend brick smashing and a two-tiered roundhouse kick and she liked it, calling him reliable."

The legend-like love stories that came from among the disciples gave them hope, though there were also many cases where couples didn't meet very many times and dropped contact, friend registration was cancelled, or were sent a text that said sorry.

"Phew, those things all happen when you're young."

SwordNoob envied the passion of the disciples. If he had just been at the age of the instructors or so, he would've been able to meet a woman somehow. After all, becoming an oppa from a mister took no time at all these days.

[T/N: Oppa is an informal way to call an older male, used for both familial and external relationships. "Oppa" indicates a lot more closeness than "mister."]

However, because SwordNoob was a seasoned middle-aged man, he was very awkward with young girls and women. Granted, his fighting ability was fearsome, so despite being only in the late 200s for level, he was welcome in any party. If SwordNoob just went to the square, everyone tried to recruit him.

Only, it was just that the atmosphere was difficult in the hunting ground.

"Um, SwordNoob-nim."

"…"

They would regularly use honorifics with him. The young and youthful party members used informal speech with each other and got along intimately, but it wasn't easy for SwordNoob to fit in with them. SwordNoob tried to find a woman in the same age group as him.

"It shouldn't be hard since all kinds of people gather in the world of Royal Road."

There were many in their early 30s or 40s, of course. They were very commonly seen in a city or village. If the men fished, the ones that looked like their wives would make spicy seafood stew for them.

"Honey, please eat some spicy stew before continuing."

It was a very heartwarming sight.

There were also cases where they set up a shop and conducted business, but their young children would occasionally come to buy a weapon, armor, or miscellania.

"Son, can you buy arrows from us for 20 Gold?"

"Mom, what kind of harsh joke is that?"

“Honey, our son says he's leaving the house.”

“Alright. As his parents, it's probably our duty to at least call over a mover, right?”

There were affectionate scenes of children getting daringly ripped off by their parents.

SwordNoob went around cities and towns as he roamed. He massacred monsters that came at him in the wilderness, and also leapt into nests of monsters whilst holding one sword.

“When I was young, I did things like this so often.”

He held a sword in his mouth and leapt into the river water. When he got hungry, he skewered fish in a deep part of the clear river. It was truly difficult to overcome the water's flow and strength and swing his sword to catch fish. However, SwordNoob actually succeeded easily. That was because he didn't push forcefully, but followed the current's flow to catch fish.

Ding!

Sword Mastery skill proficiency has improved.

His Sword Mastery skill went up even while catching fish. They weren't high leveled monsters, but it seemed he could gain Sword Mastery as a characteristic of the location. Like Sculpting, the Sword Mastery skill grew on diverse experiences.

“While I'm like this…”

SwordNoob floated to the top of the water, took in a big breath, and went into the river again.

Swiiiisshh!

The sword he swung in a single breath slid past the body of a fish.

Swordsmanship that was thinly slicing sashimi!

The fish was become sashimi while blinking its eyes, alive. And while underwater, as well!

Sorriness filled SwordNoob's eyes. 'Looks like I can't do this because it's cruel.'

It had been a long time since he had properly shown off his swordsmanship skills. After that time when life and death had been separated by a second, he had never done his best. Even Royal Road was simply entertainment. It was so that he could try testing his still-honed swordsmanship, but he was sorry for the fish. SwordNoob almost never even hunted herbivores like rabbits, squirrels, or deer in the Versailles Continent, either.

'Something I can't even eat… there's no need to take their lives pointlessly.'

Feeling sorry, SwordNoob wrapped the fish in bandages. They were still alive, due to his marvelous swordsmanship.

“Gasp!”

Then he rose to the top of the water and moved downstream. It wasn't that he determined his destination, he was just wandering randomly.

There were people downstream the river. He heard a conversation of a middle-aged man raising a fishing pole and his wife.

“D-dear.”

“Hm?”

“We just… caught sashimi!”

A live catfish with its bandages almost fallen off had bitten their fishing pole's bait and was coming up.

“The world is truly difficult.”

SwordNoob sat down under a large old tree.

His Sword Mastery skill was Advanced level 6 at 89 %. With growth at an unbelievable speed, it was at a stage where Master level of Sword Mastery was not far. But what worth was there in raising his level and polishing his Sword Mastery skill?

“This is the vice of an old dog. Might there not be a middle-aged woman wandering around alone?”

Even trying to start a conversation with pretended friendliness with a woman he'd never seen before was awkward. A husband coming to take her away while he was observing and agonizing over whether it was fine to talk to her had happened to him a couple times, so he didn't even have the will to try anymore.

When SwordNoob was condemning himself, a girl who looked to be in her late teens approached him.

“Mister, what are you doing here?”

“…”

SwordNoob didn't reply and flicked his hand as if to shoo her away. Looking like a player, the human girl was considerably cute and pretty.

'She'll probably just ask me about the hunting ground.'

Normally he would answer her kindly. It wasn't because he wanted to do something bad to the adorable and young girl, but so that he could give her at least a little help.

'Zephyr also gave advice. It's important to have lots of conversations with women.'

Actually, a girl starting a conversation with him only numbered a few times in SwordNoob's life. He was big, so his appearance was one that women couldn't easily approach. But more than that, his eyes and spirit were on a different level from normal people, so even gangsters avoided him.

Right now, he wanted to be alone because he felt like wanting to quit it all. However, the girl sat down in front of SwordNoob with no intention of leaving.

“Hey mister, are you alone?”

SwordNoob only slightly nodded his head. 'Seeing as she's intentionally asking on, is she a merchant who's trying to sell something? Or does she want help? Guess I should give her a roughly useful weapon if I've got one left.'

The girl hesitated for a moment before asking again. “Would you like to hunt with us?”

At the words that differed from his expectations, SwordNoob was a little curious. “Are you inviting me to your party right now?”

Towards his disciples, he stuck to a short and stern way of talking. He tried not to alarm the girl, but his voice was even more low and grave because he didn't have much experience with talking to the opposite sex.

Spurred on by his not-adverse reaction, the girl's voice gained strength. “Let's hunt together, okay?”

“Maybe. It's a pain… if you'd like a hunting ground recommendation, I can do that much for you.”

“We came all the way here from Rosenheim Kingdom. It's a little too much for us to hunt on our own, you see.”

“Huh.” In the end, SwordNoob couldn't refuse this cute girl's request and rose from his seat. 'Alright. I've got nothing else to do, so it won't be bad to hunt with them for a bit.'

Even if the girl had come acting friendly on purpose because she wanted help, he planned to let that much go.

SwordNoob asked without much thought, “Your other companions are?”

“There are two people, my mom and youngest aunt. Mom's profession is Elementalist and Aunt's profession is Summoner.”

Women often picked those professions because the spirits or summoned creatures were cute.

'Elementalist, Summoner. And is this child a Magician? I guess it would be hard for the three of them to hunt.'

Even as they walked to the party, the girl kept chattering. “Dad is busy from work, so he can't play with us. My youngest aunt still doesn't have a boyfriend from graduating from college and studying abroad.” For some reason, the girl was describing the youngest aunt in detail. “She's an accountant. She's thirty-two this year, but she's never dated 'cause she drowned herself in studying. She's pretty, skinny, and also has a good personality. There's a big age gap between her and my mom, so she also played with me like a sister since I was young.”

“I see.”

“But her standards are high, so… she went on a few blind dates, but she said she didn't even see most men as men and left right away.”

“Her standards must be high.”

SwordNoob listened to her words impassively. Then they reached the location of the girl's party. There was a calm-looking, middle-aged woman with a big dog-like spirit, and a lady with a graceful face in her early 30s.

The girl grinned as she said, “My aunt likes macho men. She also likes martial arts.”

“…!”

* * *

The Assassin Steer was in charge of information gathering for the Hermes Guild. Using contact groups spread extensively, his task was to keep an eye on the trends of the Versailles Continent.

“There's a high possibility that the Lord of the North's Morata is Wargod Weed…”

Steer considered this a matter that needed to be reported to his superior.

Bardray was currently in the Ziubellin Dungeon of Haven Kingdom. It was not an exaggeration to say that the hunting ground poured out monsters. Not only in Haven Kingdom, but no matter where you went on the Versailles Continent, it was among the worst hunting grounds for players. Turning off his whispers and even the guild chatting window, Bardray had declared that he wouldn't come out before he hunted the formidable sorcerer named Ziubellin.

“What should we we do, Steer-nim?” asked his subordinate in information.

Bardray spent most of his time inside dungeons with his teammates. Nobody knew when their hunt would end.

Steer sighed. “We have no choice but go ourselves. Send a request to the guild corps. We'll enter the dungeon in order to meet guild master Bardray-nim.”

Steer and 30 members of the Hermes Guild entered the dungeon. They were all over level 360, but the level of the monsters was too high in Ziubellin Dungeon, so they couldn't help but shrink back. After many complications, they finally reached the place where Bardray was at.

Bardray was resting and maintaining his weapons with his 12 Elite Guard. Monster corpses were lying around the place where they were resting, exuding a foul smell.

“Bardray-nim.”

“For what matter did you come all the way here, Steer?”

“There is something I must report.”

Bardray looked interested. As befitting of him, who dominated as

the strongest in the Versailles Continent and was completely equipped with ultimate items, he had overflowing composure.

"It's about Wargod Weed."

"Weed, you say…"

Bardray nodded his head. "If it's about him, then it would be worthwhile for you to come find me all the way here."

"Weed's identity has been exposed. I believe he is the Lord of Morata. Though of course, there are still many parts about him that I still cannot understand."

"And those are?"

"It's estimated that he's a player who started in Rosenheim Kingdom, but it's that it hasn't even been a year and six months since he started Royal Road. That doesn't make much sense. And the more shocking thing is that he is *sculpting* as a side job."

"Side job?"

"Considering his fighting ability, you'd think that he wasn't actually a Sculptor. Even so, he made a Magnum Opus with the sculpting he did as a hobby, and he's good enough to shake the continent."

He had judged that the Pyramid, Light Tower, and the Goddess Statue were sculptures made as a hobby!

"Ohh, isn't that amazing?"

"Sculpting was a side job? Yikes! I was completely in awe after seeing a sculpture made by him."

Bardray's teammates all said a few words each.

"Come to think of it, if it's Weed, we could even call him our junior."

"Ah, in the Continent of Magic?"

"Since he became the best about 6 months after we left, y'know."

"We were once the best in the Continent of Magic. And for quite a long time, too."

The Elite Guard conversed gladly. They had known each other since the Continent of Magic. They had been noble lords ruling over famous castles in the Continent of Magic! Bardray had also been the best lord in the Continent of Magic.

"I do miss those times."

"Well. I don't really wanna go back; I don't want to lose the merit of this Versailles Continent's clear air and being able to fight while directly moving your body."

"I don't want to go back either, but… they were still really fun times."

The castle lords who gone through thick and thin with small wars and dispute heard of the creation of Royal Road and gathered in one spot. The popularity of Continent of Magic had passed its peak and

was obviously in decline. As rulers of one region, they felt that very distinctly. An enormous amount of items and gold actually funneled to the castle lords. They earned sums that normal employees wouldn't even be able to imagine. Most of the lords were Dark Gamers who were raising their profits while maintaining their organization. They came to a conclusion through a meeting.

They would move to Royal Road.

The lords took their forces directly into Royal Road. That was the inside story of the birth of Hermes Guild.

“Weed became extremely famous after we left.”

“He conquered quests and dungeons that even we gave up on, right? You don't know how surprised I was after hearing the news that he'd even gotten through Ivan Porte Island's labyrinth.”

“He's a truly incredible player. Though of course, if Bardray had stayed in the Continent of Magic, he wouldn't have given up his spot so easily.”

Bardray only smiled as he listened to the conversation of the Elite Guard.

The system of command that accompanied Hermes Guild's pecking order was strict, but it didn't apply to the Elite Guard. Bardray and the former castle lords, the Elite Guard, were the founding members of the Hermes Guild. Through their agreement, they decided that the very strongest among them would be the leader and govern the others. Their law was that if someone among the Elite Guard became stronger than Bardray at any time, they would then become the leader.

As such, the leader of Hermes Guild had changed a few times in the early stages of Royal Road. For both Bardray and the Elite Guard, it became an opportunity to become stronger faster through well-intentioned competition. Of course, there were also castle lords who completely fell behind during the competition. In Royal Road, you must directly move your body and possess very fast judgement and keen senses. The lords who became stragglers maintained the influence of the guild through deputies.

Hermes Guild was the best guild that originated from the Continent of Magic. They were also acquiring information about Weed through various pathways.

“The Continent of Magic and Weed…”

Bardray's face became lost in thought. Such an expression could not be found on him often.

“Steer.”

“Yes, Leader-nim.”

“Continue keeping an eye on the North.”

“Understood.”

“But there is no need to make it a bigger deal than necessary.”

“That means—?” Steer's head jerked up.

Hermes Guild normally gruesomely crushed any opponents who showed even a little speck of defiance. They dispatched assassins to either kill or bribe the key people. They also didn't hesitate to commit cruel acts, like sending out the battle forces and setting a village or castle on fire.

“There's no need. Even before we step forward, he'll be caught and eaten by hyenas seeking prey first.”

Surtr thought for a moment and nodded. “You're right, Leader-nim. The Resurrection Army led by Daymond will also go North soon.”

The Resurrection Army's force was greatly weakened. They weren't able to take Odin Fortress in the end and decided to retreat; their territory in the Central Continent was rapidly shrinking. The Resurrection Army wasn't able to hold out in the Central Continent any longer. There was no strong kingdom in the North yet, so they were were withdrawing to aim for there instead. They also had a hostile relationship with Weed, because through the quest of the Matallost Church, it was he who achieved the great service that stopped the Resurrection Army.

Bardray said, “Weed is indeed famous. However, once he suffers a defeat, his fame will disappear as quickly as it came. Ruin takes but a moment.”

The increase in skill and level through hunting, as well as power expansion! Bardray thought of those as the only things that should be shown in quests and broadcast appearances. That was because a high level and power made other players fearful and submissive to his commands.

After finishing the hunt with the Elite Guard, Bardray became deep in thought about the subject during his break time.

“The Continent of Magic, hm.”

He had left the Continent of Magic with the lords who were of the same mind as him. They had to make their characters and prepare in advance while acquiring information about Royal Road early on. However, sometimes he secretly logged into the Continent of Magic as a pastime. It wasn't hard, since his character was still right there.

The Continent of Magic was the game that he had dedicated his youth to. It was on the decline, but he was deeply fond of it, so he couldn't quit. Then he encountered rumors about Weed in the game, a rumor that he had ascended to the position of the strongest after Bardray left.

“The God of War Weed. That Weed is currently the best on the Continent of Magic.”

“Is he just having an easy time 'cause Bardray isn't logging in?”

“It's the opposite. We've got to see him as being way more outstanding than Bardray. Not only did he single-handledly catch a dragon that Bardray couldn't hunt, but he also explores dungeons alone.”

“You mean by himself without anyone's help?”

“It's something Bardray could never have done.”

Bardray's pride was wounded. He let it pass since he wasn't one to just believe a rumor, but it still felt nasty. And then, not long afterwards, he met Weed while hunting alone in a dungeon, like a joke of fate. When Bardray saw his equipment and name, he had a hunch that it was the Weed of the rumors.

In the Continent of Magic, speaking had to be done by typing on a keyboard.

“Are you We—”

Even before Bardray finished typing his question of whether he was Weed or not, his opponent activated an attack skill. Because it was Weed, who attacked ruthlessly if he met someone in a dungeon!

Bardray had to hastily use defensive skills and flee. He was barely able to escape with only about 300 Health left.

That was a day of shame that could absolutely never be washed away for Bardray, who had reigned as the strongest.

After fully recovering his Health and Mana and even cleaning his best equipment, Bardray challenged Weed again.

“I am Bardray. Weed, I shall cut your throat.”

He quickly inserted the speech he had typed up beforehand, but there was no reaction from his opponent. That was because he didn't know who Bardray was, nor did he even care.

Weed just activated an attack skill, as per usual.

In the fight that started in that manner, Bardray felt a wall he couldn't put into words. It felt like facing a fortress that was so tall and thick that the current him would never be able to defeat.

Weed slipped past all the chain skills he used. There wasn't a big difference between their equipment and level, but the skill management decided it. No matter what kind of attack Bardray tried, he responded rapidly and unleashed a counter attack. Amidst despair that was like facing a boundless ocean, Bardray experienced defeat.

Bardray couldn't accept this fact.

His pride as the strongest on the Continent of Magic had been shattered. Even though he'd taken a brief break, with his history in the Continent of Magic, he had thought that there was no way he could lose.

Bardray secretly chased Weed and fought him again five times.

But the result was the same every time. Even when he changed

his skill management or fighting method, he was destroyed so very easily.

Weed's level gradually went up, and his equipment was better every time they met, even though hunting monsters with severe differences in level gave you almost no EXP.

He surpassed the level that Bardray had considered the limit and pioneered hunting grounds on his own to achieve the ultimate stage.

“I will completely stamp you down. Not just you, but everyone you know as well, so that you can't even get a foothold again in the Versailles Continent!”